PD RUSSIAN LITERATURE



Boris Israelevich Anisfeld (Russian, 1879-1973). Clouds over the Black Sea--Crimea, 1906. Oil on canvas, 49 1/2 x 56 in. (125.7 x 142.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Boris Anisfeld in memory of his wife, 33.416

TOLSTOY KUPRIN ANDREYEV

CHEKHOV PUSHKIN GOGOL

TURGENEV GORKY BUNIN

and a selection of poetry

HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?

Project Gutenberg's *What Men Live By and Other Tales*, by Leo Tolstoy

I

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a tradesman in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life: saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theatre, promenades, and entertainments.

The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of a peasant.

"I would not change my way of life for yours," said she. "We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, 'Loss and gain are brothers twain.' It often happens that people who are wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a fat one, it is a long one. We shall never grow rich, but we shall always have enough to eat."

The elder sister said sneeringly:

"Enough? Yes, if you like to share with the pigs and the calves! What do you know of elegance or manners! However much your good man may slave, you will die as you are living-on a dung heap-and your children the same."

"Well, what of that?" replied the younger. "Of course our work is rough and coarse. But, on the other hand, it is sure; and we need not bow to any one. But you, in your towns, are surrounded by temptations; today all may be right, but tomorrow the Evil One may tempt your husband with cards, wine, or women, and all will go to ruin. Don't such things happen often enough?"

Pahom, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the oven, and he listened to the women's chatter.

"It is perfectly true," thought he. "Busy as we are from childhood tilling Mother Earth, we peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough. If

I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!"

The women finished their tea, chatted a while about dress, and then cleared away the tea-things and lay down to sleep.

But the Devil had been sitting behind the oven, and had heard all that was said. He was pleased that the peasant's wife had led her husband into boasting, and that he had said that if he had plenty of land he would not fear the Devil himself.

"All right," thought the Devil. "We will have a tussle. I'll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you into my power."

II

Close to the village there lived a lady, a small landowner, who had an estate of about three hundred acres. She had always lived on good terms with the peasants, until she engaged as her steward an old soldier, who took to burdening the people with fines. However careful Pahom tried to be, it happened again and again that now a horse of his got among the lady's oats, now a cow strayed into her garden, now his calves found their way into her meadows-and he always had to pay a fine.

Pahom paid, but grumbled, and, going home in a temper, was rough with his family. All through that summer Pahom had much trouble because of this steward; and he was even glad when winter came and the cattle had to be stabled. Though he grudged the fodder when they could no longer graze on the pasture-land, at least he was free from anxiety about them.

In the winter the news got about that the lady was going to sell her land, and that the keeper of the inn on the high road was bargaining for it. When the peasants heard this they were very much alarmed.

"Well," thought they, "if the innkeeper gets the land he will worry us with fines worse than the lady's steward. We all depend on that estate."

So the peasants went on behalf of their Commune, and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper; offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the Commune to buy the whole estate, so that it might be held by all in common. They met twice to discuss it, but could not settle the matter; the Evil One sowed discord among them, and they could not agree. So they decided to buy the land individually, each according to his means; and the lady agreed to this plan as she had to the other.

Presently Pahom heard that a neighbor of his was buying fifty acres, and that the lady had consented to accept one half in cash and to wait a year for the other half. Pahom felt envious.

"Look at that," thought he, "the land is all being sold, and I shall get none of it." So he spoke to his wife.

"Other people are buying," said he, "and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible. That steward is simply crushing us with his fines."

So they put their heads together and considered how they could manage to buy it. They had one hundred roubles laid by. They sold a colt, and one half of their bees; hired out one of their sons as a laborer, and took his wages in advance; borrowed the rest from a brother-in-law, and so scraped together half the purchase money.

Having done this, Pahom chose out a farm of forty acres, some of it wooded, and went to the lady to bargain for it. They came to an agreement, and he shook hands with her upon it, and paid her a deposit in advance. Then they went to town and signed the deeds; he paying half the price down, and undertaking to pay the remainder within two years.

So now Pahom had land of his own. He borrowed seed, and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay off his debts both to the lady and to his brother-in-law. So he became a landowner, ploughing and sowing his own land, making hay on his own land, cutting his own trees, and feeding his cattle on his own pasture. When he went out to plough his fields, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass meadows, his heart would fill with joy. The grass that grew and the flowers that bloomed there, seemed to him unlike any that grew elsewhere. Formerly, when he had passed by that land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

III

So Pahom was well contented, and everything would have been right if the neighboring peasants would only not have trespassed on his corn-fields and meadows. He appealed to them most civilly, but they still went on: now the Communal herdsmen would let the village cows stray into his meadows; then horses from the night pasture would get among his corn. Pahom turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he forbore from prosecuting any one. But at last he lost patience and complained to the District Court. He knew it was the

peasants' want of land, and no evil intent on their part, that caused the trouble; but he thought:

"I cannot go on overlooking it, or they will destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson."

So he had them up, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants were fined. After a time Pahom's neighbours began to bear him a grudge for this, and would now and then let their cattle on his land on purpose. One peasant even got into Pahom's wood at night and cut down five young lime trees for their bark. Pahom passing through the wood one day noticed something white. He came nearer, and saw the stripped trunks lying on the ground, and close by stood the stumps, where the tree had been. Pahom was furious.

"If he had only cut one here and there it would have been bad enough," thought Pahom, "but the rascal has actually cut down a whole clump. If I could only find out who did this, I would pay him out."

He racked his brains as to who it could be. Finally he decided: "It must be Simon-no one else could have done it." Se he went to Simon's homestead to have a look around, but he found nothing, and only had an angry scene. However' he now felt more certain than ever that Simon had done it, and he lodged a complaint. Simon was summoned. The case was tried, and re-tried, and at the end of it all Simon was acquitted, there being no evidence against him. Pahom felt still more aggrieved, and let his anger loose upon the Elder and the Judges.

"You let thieves grease your palms," said he. "If you were honest folk yourselves, you would not let a thief go free."

So Pahom quarrelled with the Judges and with his neighbors. Threats to burn his building began to be uttered. So though Pahom had more land, his place in the Commune was much worse than before.

About this time a rumor got about that many people were moving to new parts.

"There's no need for me to leave my land," thought Pahom. "But some of the others might leave our village, and then there would be more room for us. I would take over their land myself, and make my estate a bit bigger. I could then live more at ease. As it is, I am still too cramped to be comfortable."

One day Pahom was sitting at home, when a peasant passing through the village, happened to call in. He was allowed to stay the night, and supper was given him. Pahom had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the

Volga, where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were settling in those parts. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined the Commune, and had had twenty-five acres per man granted them. The land was so good, he said, that the rye sown on it grew as high as a horse, and so thick that five cuts of a sickle made a sheaf. One peasant, he said, had brought nothing with him but his bare hands, and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.

Pahom's heart kindled with desire. He thought:

"Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if one can live so well elsewhere? I will sell my land and my homestead here, and with the money I will start afresh over there and get everything new. In this crowded place one is always having trouble. But I must first go and find out all about it myself."

Towards summer he got ready and started. He went down the Volga on a steamer to Samara, then walked another three hundred miles on foot, and at last reached the place. It was just as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land: every man had twenty-five acres of Communal land given him for his use, and any one who had money could buy, besides, at fifty-cents an acre as much good freehold land as he wanted.

Having found out all he wished to know, Pahom returned home as autumn came on, and began selling off his belongings. He sold his land at a profit, sold his homestead and all his cattle, and withdrew from membership of the Commune. He only waited till the spring, and then started with his family for the new settlement.

IV

As soon as Pahom and his family arrived at their new abode, he applied for admission into the Commune of a large village. He stood treat to the Elders, and obtained the necessary documents. Five shares of Communal land were given him for his own and his sons' use: that is to say--125 acres (not altogether, but in different fields) besides the use of the Communal pasture. Pahom put up the buildings he needed, and bought cattle. Of the Communal land alone he had three times as much as at his former home, and the land was good corn-land. He was ten times better off than he had been. He had plenty of arable land and pasturage, and could keep as many head of cattle as he liked.

At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahom was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it he began to think that even here

he had not enough land. The first year, he sowed wheat on his share of the Communal land, and had a good crop. He wanted to go on sowing wheat, but had not enough Communal land for the purpose, and what he had already used was not available; for in those parts wheat is only sown on virgin soil or on fallow land. It is sown for one or two years, and then the land lies fallow till it is again overgrown with prairie grass. There were many who wanted such land, and there was not enough for all; so that people quarrelled about it. Those who were better off, wanted it for growing wheat, and those who were poor, wanted it to let to dealers, so that they might raise money to pay their taxes. Pahom wanted to sow more wheat; so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed much wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village--the wheat had to be carted more than ten miles. After a time Pahom noticed that some peasant-dealers were living on separate farms, and were growing wealthy; and he thought:

"If I were to buy some freehold land, and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing, altogether. Then it would all be nice and compact."

The question of buying freehold land recurred to him again and again.

He went on in the same way for three years; renting land and sowing wheat. The seasons turned out well and the crops were good, so that he began to lay money by. He might have gone on living contentedly, but he grew tired of having to rent other people's land every year, and having to scramble for it. Wherever there was good land to be had, the peasants would rush for it and it was taken up at once, so that unless you were sharp about it you got none. It happened in the third year that he and a dealer together rented a piece of pasture land from some peasants; and they had already ploughed it up, when there was some dispute, and the peasants went to law about it, and things fell out so that the labor was all lost. "If it were my own land," thought Pahom, "I should be independent, and there would not be all this unpleasantness."

So Pahom began looking out for land which he could buy; and he came across a peasant who had bought thirteen hundred acres, but having got into difficulties was willing to sell again cheap. Pahom bargained and haggled with him, and at last they settled the price at 1,500 roubles, part in cash and part to be paid later. They had all but clinched the matter, when a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahom's one day to get a feed for his horse. He drank tea with Pahom, and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkirs, far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land all for 1,000 roubles. Pahom questioned him further, and the tradesman said:

"All one need do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred roubles' worth of dressing-gowns and carpets, besides a case

of tea, and I gave wine to those who would drink it; and I got the land for less than two cents an acre. And he showed Pahom the title-deeds, saying:

"The land lies near a river, and the whole prairie is virgin soil."

Pahom plied him with questions, and the tradesman said:

"There is more land there than you could cover if you walked a year, and it all belongs to the Bashkirs. They are as simple as sheep, and land can be got almost for nothing."

"There now," thought Pahom, "with my one thousand roubles, why should I get only thirteen hundred acres, and saddle myself with a debt besides. If I take it out there, I can get more than ten times as much for the money."

V

Pahom inquired how to get to the place, and as soon as the tradesman had left him, he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to look after the homestead, and started on his journey taking his man with him. They stopped at a town on their way, and bought a case of tea, some wine, and other presents, as the tradesman had advised. On and on they went until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to a place where the Bashkirs had pitched their tents. It was all just as the tradesman had said. The people lived on the steppes, by a river, in felt-covered tents. They neither tilled the ground, nor ate bread. Their cattle and horses grazed in herds on the steppe. The colts were tethered behind the tents, and the mares were driven to them twice a day. The mares were milked, and from the milk kumiss was made. It was the women who prepared kumiss, and they also made cheese. As far as the men were concerned, drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton, and playing on their pipes, was all they cared about. They were all stout and merry, and all the summer long they never thought of doing any work. They were quite ignorant, and knew no Russian, but were good-natured enough.

As soon as they saw Pahom, they came out of their tents and gathered round their visitor. An interpreter was found, and Pahom told them he had come about some land. The Bashkirs seemed very glad; they took Pahom and led him into one of the best tents, where they made him sit on some down cushions placed on a carpet, while they sat round him. They gave him tea and kumiss, and had a sheep killed, and gave him mutton to eat. Pahom took presents out of his cart and distributed them among the

Bashkirs, and divided amongst them the tea. The Bashkirs were delighted. They talked a great deal among themselves, and then told the interpreter to translate.

"They wish to tell you," said the interpreter, "that they like you, and that it is our custom to do all we can to please a guest and to repay him for his gifts. You have given us presents, now tell us which of the things we possess please you best, that we may present them to you."

"What pleases me best here," answered Pahom, "is your land. Our land is crowded, and the soil is exhausted; but you have plenty of land and it is good land. I never saw the like of it."

The interpreter translated. The Bashkirs talked among themselves for a while. Pahom could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused, and that they shouted and laughed. Then they were silent and looked at Pahom while the interpreter said:

"They wish me to tell you that in return for your presents they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You have only to point it out with your hand and it is yours."

The Bashkirs talked again for a while and began to dispute. Pahom asked what they were disputing about, and the interpreter told him that some of them thought they ought to ask their Chief about the land and not act in his absence, while others thought there was no need to wait for his return.

VI

While the Bashkirs were disputing, a man in a large fox-fur cap appeared on the scene. They all became silent and rose to their feet. The interpreter said, "This is our Chief himself."

Pahom immediately fetched the best dressing-gown and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The Chief accepted them, and seated himself in the place of honour. The Bashkirs at once began telling him something. The Chief listened for a while, then made a sign with his head for them to be silent, and addressing himself to Pahom, said in Russian:

"Well, let it be so. Choose whatever piece of land you like; we have plenty of it."

"How can I take as much as I like?" thought Pahom. "I must get a deed to

make it secure, or else they may say, 'It is yours,' and afterwards may take it away again."

"Thank you for your kind words," he said aloud. "You have much land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me? Life and death are in God's hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it away again."

"You are quite right," said the Chief. "We will make it over to you."

"I heard that a dealer had been here," continued Pahom, "and that you gave him a little land, too, and signed title-deeds to that effect. I should like to have it done in the same way."

The Chief understood.

"Yes," replied he, "that can be done quite easily. We have a scribe, and we will go to town with you and have the deed properly sealed."

"And what will be the price?" asked Pahom.

"Our price is always the same: one thousand roubles a day."

Pahom did not understand.

"A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?"

"We do not know how to reckon it out," said the Chief. "We sell it by the day. As much as you can go round on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand roubles a day."

Pahom was surprised.

"But in a day you can get round a large tract of land," he said.

The Chief laughed.

"It will all be yours!" said he. "But there is one condition: If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started, your money is lost."

"But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?"

"Why, we shall go to any spot you like, and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Wherever you think necessary, make a mark. At every turning, dig a hole and pile up the turf; then afterwards we will go round with a plough from hole to

hole. You may make as large a circuit as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. All the land you cover will be yours."

Pahom was delighted. It-was decided to start early next morning. They talked a while, and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more mutton, they had tea again, and then the night came on. They gave Pahom a feather-bed to sleep on, and the Bashkirs dispersed for the night, promising to assemble the next morning at daybreak and ride out before sunrise to the appointed spot.

VII

Pahom lay on the feather-bed, but could not sleep. He kept thinking about the land.

"What a large tract I will mark off!" thought he. "I can easily go thirty-five miles in a day. The days are long now, and within a circuit of thirty-five miles what a lot of land there will be! I will sell the poorer land, or let it to peasants, but I'll pick out the best and farm it. I will buy two ox-teams, and hire two more laborers. About a hundred and fifty acres shall be plough-land, and I will pasture cattle on the rest."

Pahom lay awake all night, and dozed off only just before dawn. Hardly were his eyes closed when he had a dream. He thought he was lying in that same tent, and heard somebody chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkir Chief sitting in front of the tent holding his side and rolling about with laughter. Going nearer to the Chief, Pahom asked: "What are you laughing at?" But he saw that it was no longer the Chief, but the dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask, "Have you been here long?" he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahom's old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man barefoot, prostrate on the ground, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahom dreamt that he looked more attentively to see what sort of a man it was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke horror-struck.

"What things one does dream," thought he.

Looking round he saw through the open door that the dawn was breaking.

"It's time to wake them up," thought he. "We ought to be starting."

He got up, roused his man (who was sleeping in his cart), bade him harness; and went to call the Bashkirs.

"It's time to go to the steppe to measure the land," he said.

The Bashkirs rose and assembled, and the Chief came, too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahom some tea, but he would not wait.

"If we are to go, let us go. It is high time," said he.

VIII

The Bashkirs got ready and they all started: some mounted on horses, and some in carts. Pahom drove in his own small cart with his servant, and took a spade with him. When they reached the steppe, the morning red was beginning to kindle. They ascended a hillock (called by the Bashkirs a shikhan) and dismounting from their carts and their horses, gathered in one spot. The Chief came up to Pahom and stretched out his arm towards the plain:

"See," said he, "all this, as far as your eye can reach, is ours. You may have any part of it you like."

Pahom's eyes glistened: it was all virgin soil, as flat as the palm of your hand, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast high.

The Chief took off his fox-fur cap, placed it on the ground and said:

"This will be the mark. Start from here, and return here again. All the land you go round shall be yours."

Pahom took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his outer coat, remaining in his sleeveless under coat. He unfastened his girdle and tied it tight below his stomach, put a little bag of bread into the breast of his coat, and tying a flask of water to his girdle, he drew up the tops of his boots, took the spade from his man, and stood ready to start. He considered for some moments which way he had better go--it was tempting everywhere.

"No matter," he concluded, "I will go towards the rising sun."

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself, and waited for the sun to appear above the rim.

"I must lose no time," he thought, "and it is easier walking while it is still cool."

The sun's rays had hardly flashed above the horizon, before Pahom, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the steppe.

Pahom started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After having gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole and placed pieces of turf one on another to make it more visible. Then he went on; and now that he had walked off his stiffness he quickened his pace. After a while he dug another hole.

Pahom looked back. The hillock could be distinctly seen in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the glittering tires of the cartwheels. At a rough guess Pahom concluded that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer; he took off his under-coat, flung it across his shoulder, and went on again. It had grown quite warm now; he looked at the sun, it was time to think of breakfast.

"The first shift is done, but there are four in a day, and it is too soon yet to turn. But I will just take off my boots," said he to himself.

He sat down, took off his boots, stuck them into his girdle, and went on. It was easy walking now.

"I will go on for another three miles," thought he, "and then turn to the left. The spot is so fine, that it would be a pity to lose it. The further one goes, the better the land seems."

He went straight on a for a while, and when he looked round, the hillock was scarcely visible and the people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something glistening there in the sun.

"Ah," thought Pahom, "I have gone far enough in this direction, it is time to turn. Besides I am in a regular sweat, and very thirsty."

He stopped, dug a large hole, and heaped up pieces of turf. Next he untied his flask, had a drink, and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahom began to grow tired: he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

"Well," he thought, "I must have a rest."

He sat down, and ate some bread and drank some water; but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first he walked easily: the food had strengthened him; but it had become terribly hot, and he felt sleepy; still he went on, thinking: "An hour to suffer, a life-time to live."

He went a long way in this direction also, and was about to turn to the left again, when he perceived a damp hollow: "It would be a pity to leave that out," he thought. "Flax would do well there." So he went on past the hollow, and dug a hole on the other side of it before he turned the corner. Pahom looked towards the hillock. The heat made the air hazy: it seemed to be quivering, and through the haze the people on the hillock could scarcely be seen.

"Ah!" thought Pahom, "I have made the sides too long; I must make this one shorter." And he went along the third side, stepping faster. He looked at the sun: it was nearly half way to the horizon, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the goal.

"No," he thought, "though it will make my land lopsided, I must hurry back in a straight line now. I might go too far, and as it is I have a great deal of land."

So Pahom hurriedly dug a hole, and turned straight towards the hillock.

IX

Pahom went straight towards the hillock, but he now walked with difficulty. He was done up with the heat, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs began to fail. He longed to rest, but it was impossible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

"Oh dear," he thought, "if only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late?"

He looked towards the hillock and at the sun. He was still far from his goal, and the sun was already near the rim. Pahom walked on and on; it was very hard walking, but he went quicker and quicker. He pressed on, but was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his flask, and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

"What shall I do," he thought again, "I have grasped too much, and ruined the whole affair. I can't get there before the sun sets."

And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahom went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a blacksmith's bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him. Pahom was seized with terror lest he should die of the strain.

Though afraid of death, he could not stop. "After having run all that way they will call me a fool if I stop now," thought he. And he ran on and on, and drew near and heard the Bashkirs yelling and shouting to him, and their cries inflamed his heart still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the rim, and cloaked in mist looked large, and red as blood. Now, yes now, it was about to set! The sun was quite low, but he was also quite near his aim. Pahom could already see the people on the hillock waving their arms to hurry him up. He could see the fox-fur cap on the ground, and the money on it, and the Chief sitting on the ground holding his sides. And Pahom remembered his dream.

"There is plenty of land," thought he, "but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life, I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot!"

Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth: one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up--the sun had already set. He gave a cry: "All my labor has been in vain," thought he, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkirs still shouting, and remembered that though to him, from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the Chief laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahom remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry: his legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

"Ah, what a fine fellow!" exclaimed the Chief. "He has gained much land!"

Pahom's servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead!

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.



MEASLES

From: *Sasha And Other Stories*, By A. Kuprin
Translated From The Russian By Douglas Ashby
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IT was before dinner and Dr. Iliashenko had just finished bathing with a student named Voskrcs-enski. The warm, south-east wind had whipped the sea into eddies. Close to the shore, the water was murky and had a sharp smell of fish and sea-plants. The hot, swinging waves did not cool and refresh one's body, but on the contrary, fatigued and unnerved it still more.

" Come on out, my colleague," the doctor exclaimed as he splashed a handful of water over his own large white stomach. " We shall get faint if we go on bathing hke this."

From the bathing-machine, they had to climb up the mountain along a narrow path which was laid in friable black slate, zig-zag fashion, covered with small rough oak and pale green sea-cole heads. Voskrescnski cUmbed up easily, his long muscular legs moving in spacious strides. But the fat doctor, who wore a wet towel instead of a hat, succumbed to the heat and to his asthma. He came to a dead stop at last with his hand on his heart, shaking his head and breathing laboriously.

"Phew! I can't stick it any longer. I'd almost rather be back in the water. Let's stop for a minute."

They halted in a flat circle between two joints of the path, and both of them turned round to face the sea.

Flogged by the wind, now dazzlingly lit up by the svm, now shadowed by clouds — it was a medley of patches of colour. By the shore, the white foam melted into a large fringe of tulle lace on the sand ; further out ran a dirty ribbon of light chocolate colour, still further lay a miserable green band, all wrinkled up and furrowed by the crests of the waves, and last of all — the powerful, tranquil bluishness of the deep sea with those fantastically bright spots — sometimes of deep purple, sometimes of a tender malachite colour, with unexpected shining pieces like ice covered with snow. The whole of this living mosaic seemed to be belted at the horizon by the black, quiet, motionless ribbon of the shoreless distance.

"All the same, it's good, isn't it ? " said the doctor.
" It's a beauty, isn't it ? Eh ? "

He stretched out his short arm, fat Hke an infant's, and with widespread fingers theatrically stroked, as it were, the course of the sea.

" Oh, it's all right," Voskresenski answered with a half-affected yawn, " but one soon gets sick of it. It's just decoration."

" Yes, yes, we've eaten it. There's a yarn about that sort of thing," IHashenko explained. " A soldier came home to his village after the war. Well, of course, he lies like an elephant and the village folk were naturally wonder-struck : ' We went,' says he, ' to the Balkans, that is to say, into the very clouds, right into the middle of them. ' ' Oh, dear, have you really been in the clouds ? ' The soldier answered indifferently : ' Well, what are the clouds to us ? We ate them the same as jelly.' "

Dr. IHashenko loved telling stories, particularly those from the life of the people and from Jewish life. Deep down in his heart, he thought that it was only through a caprice of destiny that he had not become an actor. At home he would madden his wife and children with Ostrovski, and, when paying his patients a visit, he liked to recite Nikitine's "The Driver," for which he would unfailingly rise to his feet, turn a chair round, and lean on its back with his hands turned outwards.

He read in the most unnatural, internal voice, as though he were a ventriloquist, under the impression that this was how a Russian moujik would speak.

After telling the story about the soldier he immediately burst out into a free, boisterous laugh. Voskresenski forced himself to smile,

" You see, doctor, the south . . . "he began in his jaded way, as though he had difficulty in choosing iiis words. " I'm not fond of the south. Here everything . . . somehow or other ... is oily . . . somehow . . . I don't know . . , excessive. Look at that magnolia . . . but forgive me for asking, is it a plant ? It seems as if it had been made up out of cardboard, painted green, and varnished at the top. Then look at Nature here. The sun goes up from the sea, we have the heat, in the evening it goes over the mountains and it is night at once. No birds ! Nothing of our northern dawn with the smell of young grass in it, nothing of the poetry, of twilight with the beetles, the nightingales, the stamp of cattle trotting in the dust. It's all opera scenery, but it isn't Nature."

" In your hou . . . se," the doctor sang in a hoarse little tenor. " Of course you are a Moscow town bird."

" And these moonlit nights, deuce take them ! " Voskresenski continued, as old thoughts which, up till now, he had kept to himself, stirred in him with new force. " It's a perfect torment. The sea is glossy, the stones are glossy, the trees are glossy. It's a regular oleography ; the stupid cicadas squall ; you can't hide from the moon. It's sickening, and somehow or other you get agitated as if someone were tickling you in the nose with a straw."

" What a barbarian you are ! Why, in that Moscow of yours they're having twenty-five degrees of frost, and even the policemen are almost frozen, while here the roses are in full bloom and one can bathe."

"And I don't hke the southern people either," the student went on, following stubbornly his own thoughts. " Rotten little people, lazy, sensual, with narrow fore-heads, sly, dirty; they gobble up any sort of filth.

Even their poetry is somehow or other oily and mawkish ; in a word, I can't bear them."

The doctor pulled up again, swung his arms and made round, stupefied eyes.

" Tu-tu-tu," he went in a long whistle. " Et tu, Brute ? I catch in your words the spirit of our honoured patron. The Russian song, the Russian shirt, eh ? The Russian God, and the Russian largeness ? The Jews, the Sheenies, the Poles, and the other poor devils, eh ? "

" That's enough, Ivan Nikolaevitch. Stop that," Voskresenski said curtly. His face had grown suddenly pale and wrinkled as though from toothache. " There is nothing to laugh at in this. You know my point of view very well. If I haven't run away from this parrot, this fool, up till now, it is only because one must eat, but it's all much more saddening than funny. It's enough that for twenty-five roubles a month I deny myself every day the delight of expressing what suffocates me — strangles my very throat, what lowers all my thoughts."

" First rate ; but why get so hot about it ? "

" Oh, I'd hke to tell him many things," the student exclaimed, furiously shaking his strong fist, which was whitened by the tension of the muscles. " I'd hke to — Oh, this buffoon . . . Well, never mind — we're not strapped to each other for a century."

Suddenly the doctor's eyes narrowed and glittered. He took hold of Voskresenski's arm and, leaning his head playfully against his shoulder, whispered : " Listen, my boy; why boil up like this ? What sense is there in insulting Zavalishine ? It will only mean a row in a noble house, as one says, just that. You had much better combine the sweetness of vengeance with the dehghts of love. What about Anna Georgievna — eh ? Or has that come off already ? "

The student remained silent and tried to free his arm from the doctor's hand. But the other pressed it still more tightly and continued to whisper, his laughing eyes playing all the time :

" You queer fellow, you've no notion of taste. The woman is thirty-fiv\' years old, in full bloom, all Hre —

and her figure ! Haven't you had enough of playing Joseph ? She looks at you the way a cat looks at cream. Why be too scrupulous in your own country ? Remember the aphorism : A woman with experience is like a cherry picked by a sparrow — it's all the sweeter. Ah, where is my youth ? " he began theatrically in a high-pitched, bleating, throaty voice. " Where is my youth? Where is my thick crop of hair, my thirty-two teeth in my mouth, my "

Voskresenski managed at last to free himself from the doctor's clutch, but he did this so roughly that they both felt awkward.

"Forgive me, Ivan Nikolaevitch, but I simply can't listen to such meanness. It isn't bashfulness, it isn't chastity, but it merely feels dirty, and — speaking generally — I don't like it. I can't "

The doctor threw up his arms mockingly and slapped his thighs : " My dear fellow, you mean that you can't take a joke ? Personally, I have the greatest respect for other people's convictions and, honestly, I rejoice to see among the youth of to-day so many who look on these matters cleanly and honestly. But why can't one joke a httle without your spreading your tail like a peacock immediately ? Why ? "

" Forgive me," the student said, in a muflled voice.

" Ah, my dear fellow, that's not why I am saying all this. The fact is, you've got into a twitching state, the whole lot of you young fellows. Look at you, a strong man with a big chest and shoulders— why, your nerves are like a schoolgirl's. By the bye, look here," the doctor went on in a business-like tone, " you oughtn't to bathe quite so often, particularly in such a hot spell. Not being used to it, you know, you might bathe your-self into a serious illness. One of my patients contracted a nervous eczema through overdoses of sea-bathing." They were now walking along the last open stretch of the path, which had become practically smooth. To their right, the mountain rose almost to a perpendicular, while behind them, in the distance, the boihng sea seethed endlessly. To their left, bushes of dog-roses, covered with tender pink blossoms, clung to the slope, projecting above the reddish-yellow earth and the grey corked stones that resembled the backs of recumbent

animals. The student was glancing at the ground between his feet with a look of angry confusion.

" It has turned out so badly," he thought with a frown. " Yes, somehow it has turned out stupidly. As a matter of fact, the doctor's a good sort, always attentive, patient, even-tempered. It's true that he's sometimes a bit of a clown, a chatterbox, reads nothing, uses bad language and has got slack, thanks to his easy-going practice at a healthresort. . . . But all the same, he's a good fellow and I've been brusque and

rude to him "

In the meanwhile, lUashenko was carelessly knocking off with his walking-stick the little thin white flowers that smelt Uke bitter almonds, while he sang to himself in an undertone :

" In your hou . . . se I knew fi . . . rst
The sweetness of a pure and tender love."

II

They turned out on to the road. Over a high white wall, as massive as that of a fortress, rose a villa, ingeniously and stridently built after the pattern of a styHsh Russian gynseceum,with sea-horses and dragons on the roof, the shutters ornamented with variegated flowers and herbs, and carved doorways, with twisted Uttle bottle-shaped colonnades on the balconies. This pretentious, gingerbread-Uke construction produced a ponderous and incoherent impresi-ion in the full blaze of the Crimean sky, against the background of the aerial grey-bluish mountains, amid the dark, pensive, elegant cypresses and powerful plane-trees, covered from' top to bottom with plush-like moss, in proximity to the beautiful joyous sea. But the owner of the villa, Pavel Arkadievitch Zavahshine — an ex-cornet of cavalry, afterwards an estate-agent, later on an attorney in a big port town in the south, and now a well-known dealer in naphtha, a shipowner, and the president of the stock exchange committee — ^was conscious of no incongruity.

" I am a Russian, and I have the right to despise all those renaissances, rococos, and gothics," he would

shout sometimes, striking his chest. " We're not bound by what they think abroad. We've had enough of that in the past. We've bowed down to them enough. We have our own strong, original, creative power, and for a Russian gentleman hke me there is only one thing to do, and that is to spit on all this foreignness."

The table was already laid on the enormous lower balcony. They were waiting for Zavahshine, who had just arrived from town and was changing his clothes in his bedroom. Anna Georgie vna was leaning languidly back in a rocking-chair, overcome with the heat. She wore alight peignoir of Moldavian stuff, gold-embroidered with large sleeves slit up underneath almost to the shoulders. She was still very handsome, with a heavy, assured, superb beauty — the beauty of a plump, well-preserved brunette of the southern type.

" Good-morning, Doctor," she said in a deep voice, and with a slight burr. " Why didn't you guess that we wanted you yesterday ? I had such a migraine."

Without raising herself from the armchair, she lazily stretched out her hand to Ivan Nikolaevitch, while her drooping sleeve revealed her round, full shoulder with its white vaccination mark, the small blue veins in the inner curve of the elbow, and a dark, pretty little mole shghtly higher up the arm. Anna Georgievna,who insisted for some reason or other on being called " Nina " instead of Anna, knew the value of her hands and liked to show them.

The doctor leaned over the outstretched hand so respectfully that she had to pull it away by force.

" You see what a gallant doctor we have," she said as she glanced at Voskresenski with laughing, caressing eyes. " You never kiss ladies' hands. What a bear you are ! Come here, and I'll make your tie for you. You dress goodness knows how."

The student came up awkwardly and, as he leaned over her, he caught through the strong aroma of her perfume the smell of her hair as the light agile fingers ran round his neck.

Voskresenski was chaste in the straightforward, healthy meaning of the word. Naturally, from the time

that he entered his Lycee, he could not help learning everything about the most intimate relations of the sexes, but he never dreamed of doing what his comrades boasted of openly. The tranquil, healthy blood of an old Church family showed itself in him. For all that, he had no sanctimonious, hypocritical anathemas for the "shameless men." He would listen indifferently to what was said on the subject and he would make no protest against those little anecdotes without which no conversation is possible in Russian intellectual society.

He knew well what Anna Georgievna's constant playfulness really meant. When saying "good-morning" or "good-bye," she would keep his hand lingeringly in her soft, feminine and, at the same time, strong, fingers. Under the mask of playfulness, she hked to ruffle his hair, sometimes called him patronisingly by the diminutive of his name, and would say in front of him risky things with a double meaning. If by any chance they were looking over an album together or happened to be leaning side by side over the balcony watching a steamer out at sea, she would always press against him with her large bust and he would feci her hot breath on his neck, while the curls of her hard hair tickled his check.

And she roused in the student a medley of btran^^c, mixed feelings — fear, shame, passionate desire and disgust. When he thought about her she seemed to him just as exaggerated and unnatural as southern Nature. Her eyes seemed much too expressive and liquid, her hair much too dark, her lips unnaturally bright. The lazy, backward, unprincipled, sensual southern woman could be detected in every one of her movements, in every smile. If she came too close to him he could even detect, through her clothes, the warmth oozing up from her large, over-developed body.

Two schoolboys, Voskresenski's pupils, and three httle girls were seated at the table danghng their feet. Voskresenski glanced at them sideways as he stooped, and suddenly he felt ashamed of himself, ashamed for them and particularly for their mother's warm bare hands which were moving so close to his lips. Unexpectedly he drew himself up and said with a red face and a hoarse voice :

" Excuse me, I'll tie it myself."

Zavahshine was now on the balcony dressed in a fantastic national costume, a silk kaftan with a blue silk Russian shirt and high patent leather boots. This costume, which he always wore at home, made him resemble one of those provincial contractors who arc so willing to exploit to the merchant-class their large Russian nature and their clothes in the Russian style. The likeness was completed by a heavy gold chain across his stomach which tinkled with dozens uf trinkets.

Zavahshine came towards the group with a quick, heavy step, carrying his head high and smoothing picturesquely each side of his fiufly beard, v.iiich was turning slightly grey. As he came, the children jumped up from the table. Anna Georgievna rose slowly from her rocking-chair.

" Good-morning, Ivan Nikolaevitch. Good-morning, Cicero," said Zavalishine, as he stretched out his hand carelessly to the doctor and the student. " I have kept you waiting, perhaps ? Boris, grace."

Boris, with a frightened expression, jabbered out :
" Our Father, which art in Heaven."

" Now, gentlemen," said Zavalishine, waving towards the table. " Doctor, some vodka ? "

The hors-d'ceuvre were laid on a small side table. The doctor approached it, walking like a buffoon, stooping a little, bowing, clicking his heels together and rubbing his hands.

" A man was once offered some vodka," he began, as usual trying to be funny, " and he answered ' No, thank you ; firstly, I don't drink, secondly, it's too early, and thirdly, I've had a drink already.' "

" Twentieth edition," observed Zavalishine. " Have some caviare."

He pushed over to the doctor a large wooden bucket in which a silver fish-basin of caviare was standing in ice.

" How can you drink vodka in such heat ? " Anna Georgievna exclaimed, with a grimace.

Her husband looked at her solenmly, as he held to his hps a silver embossed goblet.

" There's no harm in vodka for a Russian man," he rephed imposingly.

And the doctor, having finished his glass, quacked loudly and added in the bass voice of a deacon :

"This was in time, anyhow. Well, Pavel Arkadievitch ? Does Father Meleti order a third one ? "

A man in a dress suit was serving at table. Formerly he used to wear something like a coachman's sleeveless coat, but one fine day Anna Georgievna discovered that it was improper for masters and servants to deck themselves out almost in the same costumes, and she insisted on a European dress for the footmen. On the other hand, all the dining-room furniture and ornaments displayed that restless, racking style which is called Russian decadence. Instead of a table, there was a long chest, closed on every side, and as one sat in front of it it was impossible to move one's feet forward. One had to keep them cramped all the time, while one's knees would be painfully knocking against the protuberances of the carved ornaments and one had to stretch to reach om-'s plate. The heavy, low chairs, with high backs and widespread arms, were hard and uncomfortable, like wooden stage thrones. The wooden cans for kvass, the waterjugs and the wine ewers were of such monstrous dimensions and of such absurd shapes that one had to stand up to pour out from them. And all these things were carved, burnished, and adorned with multi-coloured peacocks, fish, flowers, and the inevitable cock.

" One eats nowhere as one docs in Russia," Zavalishine began in a juicy voice, arranging his napkin in his collar with his white hairy hands. " Yes, Mr. Student, I know you don't like to hear that, but unfortunately, that's how it is. Take fish, to begin with. Where in the whole world will you find another Astrakan caviare ? And the sterlets from Kama, the sturgeons, the salmon from the Dvina, the fish from Belozer ? Be kind enough to tell me if you can find in France anything to match the Ladoga fish or the Gatchina trout. I'd just hke you to find tiiem ! I beg you to do it with all my heart. Now take game : we have every-

thing you can wish for and everything in abundance : wood-hens, heath-hens, duck, snipe, pheasants from the Caucasus, woodcocks. Tlien just tliink of our Tcher-kass meat, Rostov sucking-pig, the Nijni cucumber, the Moscow milk-calf. In a word, we've got everything . . . Serguei, give me some more botvinia soup."

Pavel Arkadievitch ate a great deal in an unpleasant and gluttonly way. He must hax'e had hungry days in his youth, thought the student, looking at him sideways. Sometimes, in the middle of a sentence, Zavalishine would put too large a morsel into his mouth and then there would be a long torturing pause, during which he would chew with objectionable haste while he looked at his interlocutor with his eyes starting out of his head, grunting, moving his eyebrows and impatiently shaking his head and even his whole body. During such pauses, Voskresenski would lower his eyes so as to conceal his antipathy.

" Wine, Doctor ? " Zavalishine offered it with careless politeness. " Let me recommend this little white label. It's Orianda '93. Your glass, Demosthenes."

"I don't drink, Pavel Arkadievitch. You'Jl excuse me."

" This is as-ton-ishing. A young man who doesn't drink and doesn't smoke. It's a bad sign." Zaval-ishine suddenly raised his voice severely. " A bad sign. I'm always suspicious of a young fellow who neither drinks nor smokes. He's either a miser or a gambler or a loose-hver. Pardon, I'm not referring to you, Mr. Empedocles. Another glass, Doctor ? This is Orianda — really not half a bad sort of Httle wine. One asks oneself why one should get from the sausage-merchants different Moselle wines and other kinds of sourness, when they make such delicious wine right at home in our own Mother Russia. Eh, what do you think, Professor ? " He addressed the student in his pro^'oking way.

Voskresenski gave a forced smile.

" Everyone to his own taste."

" ' De gustibus ? ' I know. I've had a little learning, too, in my time. Besides, somewhere or other — it doesn't matter where or how — the great Dostoievsky has expressed the same idea. Wine, of course, is nothing

in itself, mere Kinderspiel, but the principle is important. The principle is important, I tell you," he suddenly shouted. "If I am a true Russian, then everything round me must be Russian. And I want to spit on the Germans and the French. And on the Jews too. Isn't it so. Doctor ? Am I not speaking the truth ? "

"Ye-es; in fact — the principle — that is, of course, yes," lUiashenko said vaguely in his bass voice and with a gesture of doubt.

" I'm proud of being a Russian," Zavalisliinc went (.n with heat. " Oh, I see perfectly that my convictions seem merely funny to you, Mr. Student, and, so to speak, barbarous. But what about it ? Take me as I am. I speak my thoughts and opinions straight out, because I'm a straight man, a real Russian, who is accustomed to speaking his mind. Yes, I say, straight out to every-one : we've had enough of standing on our hind legs before Europe. Let her be afraid of us, not we of her. Let them feel that the last decisive powerful word is for the great, glorious, healthy Russian people and not for those cockroaches' remains ! Glory be to God . . ." ZavaUshine suddenly crossed himself expansively, look(d up at the ceiling, and gave a sob. "Thank God thai you can find now more and more of those people who art> beginning to understand that the short-taiKd German jacket is already cracking on the mighty Russian shoulders. These people are not ashamed of their language, of their faith, of their country-, and confidently they stretch out their hands to the wise Governnunt and say: ' Lead us.' "

" Paul, you're getting excited," Anna Georgie*na remarked lazily.

" I'm not getting in the least excited," her husband snarled angrily. " I'm only expressing what every honest Russian subject ought to think and feel. Perhaps someone is not of my opinion? Well then, let him answer me. I am ready to listen with pleasure to a different opinion. There, for instance, it seems funny to Mr. Vozdvijenski ..."

The student did not raise his downcast eyes, but became pale and his nostrils quivered and dilated.

" My name is Voskresenski," he said in a low voice.

" I beg your pardon, that's exactly wliat I meant to say: Voznescnski. I bog your pardt)n. Well, I just ask you this : instead of making wry faces, hadn't you better break down my arguments, show me my error, prove that I'm not right ? I say this one thing : we're spitting into our own soup. They're selling our holy, mighty, adored country to any sort of foreign riff-raff. Who manage our naphtha ? The Sheenies, the Armenians, the Americans. In whose hands are the coal, the mines, the steamers, the electricity ? In the hands of Sheenies, Belgians, Germans. Who have got the sugar factories ? The Sheenies, the Germans, the Poles. And above all, everywhere, the Sheeny, the Sheeny, the Sheeny. . . . WTio are our doctors ? Sheenies. Who are our chemists, bankers, barristers ? To Hell with the whole lot of you ! The whole of our Russian hterature dances to the Sheenies' tune and never gets out of it. Why are you making such terrible eyes at me, Anitchka ? You don't know what that means ? I'll explain later. Yes, there's point in the joke that every Sheeny is a born Russian litterateur. Oh, my goodness, the Sheenies, the Israelites, the Zionists, the Innocents oppressed, the Holy Tribe. I'll say just this." — Zavalishine struck the edge of the table loudly and fiercely with his outstretched finger — " I'll say just this : Here, wherever you turn, you're confronted with the mug of some noble affronted nation. Liberty, Language, National Rights. And we go into ecstasies under their noses. Oh, poor cultured Finland ! Oh, unhappy enslaved Poland ! Ah, the great tormented Jewish race. . . . Beat us, my pigeons, despise us, trample us under your feet, sit on our backs and drive ! B-ut no " Zavalishing roared in a threatening voice, growing suddenly scarlet and rolling his eyes. " No," he repeated, striking himself on the chest with all his force. " This scandal is going to end. Up till now, the Russian people has been only scratching himself, half asleep ; but to-morrow, with God's blessing, he will awake. And then he will shake off from himself the mischievous Radical in-tel-lec-tuals as a dog would a flea, and will squeeze so tightly in his mighty palm all these innocents oppressed, all these dirty little Sheenies, Ukrainians, and Poles, that the sap will spurt out from them on all sides. And to Europe he will merely say : ' Stand up, you dog.' "

" Bravo ! Bravo ! Bravo ! " the doctor broke in with a voice like a gramophone.

The schoolboys, who had been frightened at first by the shouting, burst into a loud laugh at this, but Anna Georgievna said with a look of suffering :

"Paul, why do you go on hke this in front of the children ? "

Zavalishine drained a glass of wine at a gulp and poured out another hastily.

" Pardon, it slipped out. But I will say this, I was expressing my convictions just now, honestly and sincerely at least. Now let them — that is, I meant to say, let Mr. Student here, let him refute what I say, let him convince me. I'm ready for him. It would be very much more honest than to evade it by wry little smiles."

Voskresenski shrugged his shoulders slowly.

"I'm not smiling at all."

"Ah ! You don't even give yourself the trouble of answering ? Of course. That is the be-s-t of all. You stand so high above any discussion or proofs ? "

" No, not in the least above. But it's like this — we'll never understand each other. What's the use of getting angry and spoiling one's temper ? "

"Quite so. I understand. You're too high and mighty then ? " Zavalishine was getting drunk and beginning to roar. " Ah, it's a pity, a great pity, my precious youth. It would have been such a treat to enjov the milk of your wisdom."

At this instant Voskresenski raised his eyes towards ZavaHshine for the first time. Suddenly he felt a wave of keen hatred for his round, light, protruding eyes, for his red nose, that seemed to be torn at the nostrils, for his white, bald, retreating forehead and his preposterous beard. And instinctively, as if against his will, he began to speak in a faint, stifled voice that was almost a stranger'b. t? t

" You insist on dragging me into a discussion. But I assure vou that it's useless. Everything that you were good enough to express just now with such fire, I have

heard and read hundreds of times. Hostility to everything European, a rancorous spite against kindred races, ecstacy before the might of the Russian fist, and so on, andsoon. . .All this has been said, written, and preached on every doorstep. But what has the people here to do with it all, Pavel Arkadievitch ? — that's what I don't understand. That's what I cannot understand. The people — that is to say, not your valet or your porter or your workmen, but the people who composes the whole of Russia — the obscure moujik, the troglodyte, the cave man, why have you buttoned him up in your national dreams ? He is silent because he is thriving. You had better not touch him. Leave him in peace. It is not for you or for me to guess at his silence "

" Allow me ! My knowledge of the people is no worse than yours "

" No," the student interrupted impertinently.
" Allow me now, please. You were good enough, a few minutes ago, to reproach me for laughing at your verbiage. Well, I will tell you now that there is nothing funny in it, just as there is nothing terrible. Your ideal, the a-all-Rus-sian f-ist squeezing the sap out of all the little peoples, is dangerous to no one, but is merely repulsive, like every symbol of violence. You're not a malady, not an ulcer, you are simply an inevitable, annoying rash, a kind of measles. But your comedy of the large Russian nature, all these symbols of yours — your Russian kaftan, your patriotic tears — yes, all this is really funny. "

"Ah, ex-cellent. Go on, young man, in the same spirit," Zavahshine said causticahy with a grimace on his lips. " It's a dehcious system of polemics, isn't it. Doctor ? "

For his part Voskresenski felt in his heart that he was speaking loosely, clumsily, and confusedly, but he could not stop now. In his brain there was the sensation of a strange, cold void. His feet had become slack and heavy and his heart seemed to have fallen somewhere deep down and to be quivering tliere and breaking from too frequent strokes.

'^ What does the system matter ? To the devil with it ! " he exclaimed, and this exclamation flew out unexpectedly in such a full, strong sound that he suddenly

experienced a fierce and joyous pleasure. " I have been too silent during these two months to pick and choose a system. Yes. One is ashamed and pitiful and amused in turn at your comedy, Pavel Arkadievitch. You know the strolling minstrels who sing in the recreation gardens in summer ? You know the sort of thing— the hackneyed Russian song. It is something torturingly false, impudent, disgraceful. The same with you : ' The Russian soup, the Russian kacha— our mother Russia.' Have j^ou ever liad a look at the people's soups ? Have you ever had a real taste of it ? One clay with something to eat, and the next day with nothing at all. Have you tasted the peasants' bread ? Have you seen their children with swollen stomachs and legs like wheels ? And in your house your cook gets sixty roubles a month, and the valet wears dress clothes, and the sterliadka is steamed. That's how you are in everything. Russian patience. Russian iron endurance. But with what horrors of slavery, on what a bloodstained road was this patience bought ! It is even ludicrous ! Russian invincible health — give way to the shoulder there ! — the Russian giant strength — have we got it in this huge, overworked, overstrained, famished, drunken man ? And then, to cap everything, the frantic yell : ' Down with European coats and dress clothes ! Let us go back to our good, glorious, vast and picturesque Russian national clothes.' And then, to the annisemcnt of your servants, you masquerade in a Russian kaftan at seven roubles a yard with a moire linin.c:;. All your nationalism is silk-hned. My God ! and when you start talking about the Russian songs, what rubbish ! In it you hear the sea, and see the steppe, you catch the voice of the forest and some kind of boundless daring. But there is no truth in all this : you hear nothing, you feel notliing beyond the sick groaning or the drunken hiccup. And you do not see any kind of large steppe, because it has no existence, and there is only a sweating face distorted by torture, swollen veins, bloodshot eyes, an open, sanguinary mouth ..."

" Foi you clergy it is easier to see from the belfry," Zavalishine sneered scornfully.

But the student only waved him aside and went on :

" Then Russian architecture came into fashion, if you please. Carved cocks, some sort of wooden dressers, mugs, ewers, sunflowers, armchairs and benches on which

it is impossible to sit, with idiotic covers. Good Lord ! but don't you feel how all this accentuates the frightful poverty of our national life, the narrowness and the lack of fantasy ? A grey crepuscular creation, a Papuan architecture. A game, that's what it is precisely. A vile game, if all this is done purposely to lead the fools and gapers by the nose ; a miserable one if it is merely a fashionable fad, a sort of stupid disguise, as if the doctors in charge of a hospital were suddenly to put on hospital dressing-gowns and dance a can-can in them. That's what it is, your Russian fashion with the moire lining."

Something caught Voskresenski at the throat and he became silent. Now for the first time he realised that, in the course of his rambling speech, he had unconsciously risen to his feet and was banging his fists on the table.

" Perhaps you'd like to add something more, young man ? " Zavalishine asked with forced politeness and in a voice of exaggerated softness. He was white, his lips were grimacing and twitching and the ends of his full beard shook visibly.

"That's all," the student answered in a dull tone. " There's notliing else"

"Then kindly let me have the last word." Zavalishine rose from his place and threw down his napkin.

" Convictions are convictions, and fidelity to them is a respectable virtue. But all the same, 1 have to answer for my children, to my countr}', and my Church. Yes, I am obliged to defend them from evil, from deteriorating influences. And so — I ask you to forgive me — but one of us, either I or you, will' have to retire from their education."

Voskresenski made a sign with his head without speaking. Pavel Arkadievitch wheeled round sharply and left the table with long strides. But he stopped at the door. He was stifling with rage. He felt that the student had shown a moral superiority in this absurd discussion, a superiority obtained, not by conviction of thought, not by arguments, but by a youthful, untrammelled and, though nonsensical, a beautiful passion. And he wanted, before leaving the room, to give the tutor the last insult, a heavier one, with more sting in it. . . .

" My man will bring you the money due to you up-stairs," he said through his nose in a jerky, self-satisfied way. "And also, as arranged, your journey money."

And he went out, banging the door so noisily that the cut glass rang and vibrated on the table.

For a long time everyone was awkwardly silent on the ' balcony.

Voskresenski, with cold trembUng fingers, was making bread pills as he bent low over the table. It seemed to him that even little six-year-old Vavotchka was looking at him with curiosity and contemptuous pity.

Shall I go after him and slap his face ? Challenge him to a duel ? How badly and miserably it has all turned out ! Shall I give him back his money ? Throw it in his face ? Faugh ! what a miserable business.

All these reflections flashed at random through his brain.

" Dear Sachenka," Anna Georgievna spoke in a caressing voice as if to a child, " don't attach any importance to this. It really isn't worth it. In an hour he will admit that he was wrong, and he'll apologise. To tell you the truth, you, too, said a good deal to him."

He made no answer. He wanted, more than anything in the world, to get up at once and go somewhere far away, to hide in some dark, cool corner ; but a complex, torturing indecision chained him to his place. The doctor began to speak about something or other too loudly and in an unnatural, detached tone. " That's because he's ashamed on my account," Voskresenski thought to liimself, and he listened, scarcely understanding the words :

" One of my acquaintances who knows Arabic very well used to compare Arabian sayings with our Russian ones. There are some most curious parallels. For. instance, the Arabs say : ' Honesty is a diamond, which makes a pauper the Sultan's equal.' And in Russian it comes out : ' What about honesty if there's nothing to eat ? ' The same about hospitality. The Arabian proverb says ..."

Voskresenski rose suddenly. Without looking at anyone, his eyes downcast, he went awkwardly round the table and rushed across the balcony to the flower garden, where there was a sweet and heavy scent of roses. Behind him, he could hear Anna Georgievna's troubled voice :

" Sachenka, Alexander Petrovitch, where are you going ? We're having dessert at once . . ."

Ill

In his room upstairs, Voskresenski changed his clothes, pulled out from under the bed his old reddish box plastered all over with labels, and began to pack. Into it he flung furiously books and lectures, squeezed in his hnen, crumpled anyhow in his precipitation, and furiously tightened the ropes and straps. As his physical force, whipped up by the recent explosion of still unsatisfied anger, was spending itself, he became slightly cooler and calmer.

His packing finished, he drew himself up and looked round. All of a sudden he regretted leaving his room, as if in it he were leaving a part of himself. As soon as he woke up in the morning, he had only to raise his head from the pillow to see right in front of him the dark blue stripe of the sea just level with the windows. The light, pink, transparent blind would be gently trembling from the breeze and the whole room would be so full of morning light, so impregnated by a strong and invigorating sea air, that in the early days, on waking up, the student • used often to laugh aloud from some inner unconscious joy of life.

Voskresenski went on to the balcony. Far out in front, a long narrow cape, rounded at the end, jutted out into the sea. This rounded part was called the Battery, and behind it , circhng it sharply, a small steamer was heading out to sea. Its panting snorts, hke the heavy breathing of a dog, could be heard distinctly. Under the white awning, dark human figures were distinguishable. The steam-launch rocked a little, but boldly clambered up each wave and rolled over it, tucking its nose gallantly into the next, while the severed water

washed over its deck. And still further out, as if mid-
way between the shore and the horizon, the black, power-
ful mass of a huge steamer, with funnels bent behind,
was moving with perfect balance noiselessly and evenly.
And there came to Voskresenski in that moment, as
through a tiny httle cloud of invading sorrow, that
dehghtful, audacious longing which he always ex-
perienced when thinking of long journeys, new impres-
sions, new faces, all the hmitless stretch of the young
untasted life that lay before him.

"To-morrow, I, too, shall find myself on board ship
with others. I'll make fresh acquaintances, look at new
shores, at the sea," he thought to himself. " It's good."

" Sachenka, where are you ? Come here." It was
Anna Georgievna's voice.

He returned quickly to his room, buttoning on the
way the collar of his Russian shirt, and arranging his
hair. A formless, vague fright, a sort of dark, enervat-
ing presentiment stirred for an instant in his soul.

" I'm tired," Anna Georgievna was saying, slightly
out of breath. " How nice it is in here, so cool."

She sat down on the ledge of the window. Against
the background of the dazzling whitish-blue sky and the
deep blue of the sea beneath, the short, full figure, in
its white peignoir, outhned itself with a soft and elegant
precision. Her rough, reddish curls lit up her head in
that light with a deep golden gleam.

" Well, what is it, my angry sparrow ? " she asked,
with tender familiarity. " Haven't you cooled down
yet ? "

" Yes, I've cooled down. I'm going away at once,"
he answered in a surly tone.

" Sacha."

She pronounced his name in a low, strange, agitated
tone that Voskresenski had never heard before in his
life. He started and looked at her attentively. But she
was sitting with her back to the bright light and it was
impossible to distinguish her expression. For all that,
it seemed to the student that her eyes were shining in an

unusual way.

" Sacha, my own one," she said suddenly in a hurried, stifled voice. " No, no, dear, you won't go away. Do you hear ? Come here to me ... to me, I tell you. Oh, what a big stupid you are ! Do you hear ? You mustn't think of going ! I don't wish it. My darling, you will stay ..."

She seized his hands, pressed them tightly, and, without letting them out of her own, placed them on her knees so that, for an instant, he felt her firm and, as it were, sliding figure under the light rough material of her peignoir.

" You will stay ? Yes ? " she asked in a quick whisper, looking up into his face.

He raised his eyes and met her clouded, fixed, avid glance. A burning joy leaped from his heart, transfusing his breast, striking into his head and throbbing in his temples. All confusion and awkwardness had disappeared. On the contrary, it was a dreadful oppressive delight to gaze, so close and shamelessly, so endlessly, without pronouncing a single word, into those beautiful eyes, still sliining with tears and senseless with passion. Half consciously he divined that her glance had fallen below his eyes, and he lowered his own to her full, bright, parted Hps, behind which gleamed the moist whiteness of her teeth. Suddenly it seemed to him that the air in the room had become suffocating ; his mouth was dry and he could scarcely breathe.

" You will stay ? Yes ? True ? "

He put his arms round her and immediately felt the large beautiful body light and alive, obedient to every movement, every hint of his hands. A sort of burning, arid whirl caught him suddenly, crippling his will, his judgment, all his proud, chaste thoughts, everything in him that was clean and human. For some reason or other, he recalled the bathing before dinner and those warm, swinging insatiable waves.

" Darling, is it true, true ? " she was repeating ceaselessly.

Roughly, like a savage animal, he caught her up and

lifted her in his arms. Then, as if in delirium, he heard her frightened whisper : " The door — for God's sake the — door "

Mechanically he turned round, saw the wide-open door and beyond it the darkness of the corridor, but he did not understand the sense of these words, the significance of this door, and he immediately forgot it all. The dark, half-closed eyes were suddenly so close to his face that their contour seemed indefinite, blurred, and they themselves became enormous, fixed, monstrously shiny, and quite strange to him. Hot rocking waves broke on him, drowning his reason, burning liim as with fiery circling coils. . . .

Later on he woke up and heard with surprise her voice, which seemed to be imploring him about something :

"I adore you . . . my young, strong, beautiful ..."

She was sitting on his bed beside him, leaning her head against his shoulder with a submissive, fawning air and trying to catch his eye. But he was looking away, frowning and pulling nervously with a shaking hand at the fringe of his rug which was hanging on the foot of the bed. An invincible disgust was growing in him every second towards this woman, who had just given herself to him. He himself understood the injustice and selfishness of this feeling, but he could not overcome it, even out of gratitude, even out of compassion. Her proximity was physically repulsive to him, her touch, the noise of her rapid, jerky breathing; and though he blamed only himself for everything that had happened, a blind, senseless hatred and spite towards her was filling his soul.

" Oh, what a scoundrel I am ! What a scoundrel ! " he was thinking, and at the same time he was afraid of her reading his thoughts and feehngs on his face.

" My darUng adored one," she was saying tenderly, " why have you turned away from me ? Are you angry? Is anytliing the matter with you ? Oh, my dear one, didn't 3^ou really notice that I loved you ? From the very beginning, from the very first day. . . . Ah, but no. When you came to us in Moscow I didn't like you. What an angry one, I thought. But then afterwards . . . But, dearie, won't you look at me ? "

The student mastered himself and managed to give her awkwardly from under his eyebrows aside glance. His very throat contracted, so disgusting seemed the reddened face, splashed with powder at the nostrils and chin, the small wrinkles round the eyes and the upper hp, never noticed until this moment, and, above all, her suppUant, anxious, culpable devotion — a sort of dog's look. A shudder of repulsion came over him as he turned his head away.

" But why am I not repulsive to her ? " he was thinking in despair. " Why ? Ah, what a scoundrel I am !

" Anna Georgievna — ^Nina/' he stammered out in an unnatural, wooden voice, "you'll forgive me. . . .You'll excuse me. I'm agitated. I don't know what I'm saying. . . . Understand me. Don't be angry. ... I must be by myself. My head is going round and round."

He made an involuntary movement, as if to turn away from her, and she understood it. Her arms, that had been chnging round his neck, fell helplessly along her knees and her head bent down. She sat like this for a few more minutes and then rose silently with a resigned expression.

She understood better than the student what was happening to him now. She knew that for men the first steps in sensual passion produced the same terrible sickly sensation on beginners as the first draughts of opium, the first cigarette, the first drunken bout. She knew, too, that until this he had been intimate with no other woman, that for him she was the first; knew this from his own words before, felt it by his savage, severe shyness, his awkwardness and roughness with her.

She wanted to console, to calm him, to explain in tender motherly words the cause of his suffering, for she knew that he suffered. But she — ordinarily so bold, so self-assured — could find no words. She felt confused and shy like a young girl and she felt at fault for liis fall, for his silent anxiety, for her thirty-five years, and because she did not know, and was unable to discover, how she could help him.

" Sacha, this will pass," she said at last, ahnost under

her breath. " This will pass, believe me. Calm yourself. But don't go away. You hear me ? You'll tell me if vou want to go away, won't you ? "

«' Yes. '. . . All right, yes— yes," he repeated impatiently, looking at the door all the time.

She sighed and left the room noiselessly. Then

Voskresenski clutched his hair with both hands and fell with a groan face downwards on the pillow.

IV

The next day Voskresenski was on his way to Odessa on the large steamship .X" tin/a. Disgracefully and weakly he had run away from the Zavalishines, unable to bear his cruel remorse, unable to force himself to meet Anna Georgievna again face to face. After lying on his bed until dusk, he had put his things together as soon as it was dark and then noiselessly, stealthily, Hke a thief, he had stolen through the back entrance into the vineyard, and from there had clambered out into the road. And all the time, on his way to the post station, when driving in the diligence that was packed with silent Turks and Tartars, all through the night at the Yalta Hotel, his shame, his merciless disgust for himself, for Anna Georgievna, for everything that had happened the day before, and for his own boyish flight, never left him for a single second.

" It has all turned out as if it were a quarrel, as if it were out of revenge. I have stolen something from the Zavalishines and have runaway from them," he thought, angrily grinding his teeth.

It was a hot windless day. The sea lay quiet, caressing, of a pale emerald round the shore, light blue further out and touched only here and there by lazy little wrinkles of purple. Beneath the steamer, it was bright green, bottomless, light and transparent as air. Side by side with the steamer raced a flight of dolphins. From above, one could see perfectly how in the depths the powerful winding movements of their bodies cut through the thin water, and how, at intervals, one after the other, in quick dark semi-circles, they leaped to the

surface.

The shore receded slowly. Gradually the steep hills showed themselves and then became lost to vitw, palaces, vineyards, squat Tartar villages, whitc-wallcd villas, drowned in wavy green, and, in the background, the pale blue mountains, covered with black patches of forest, and over them the fine airy contours of the peaks.

The passengers were trooping to the taffrail that faced the shore, calling out the names of the places and the names of the owners. In the middle of the deck, near the hatchway, two musicians — a violinist and a harpist — were playing a waltz, and the stale, insipid melody sounded unusually beautiful and stimulating in the sea air,

Voskresenski searched impatiently for the villa that looked hke a gynaeceum. And when it appeared again behind the dense woods of the Prince's Park and became quite visible above its huge white fortress-hke wall, he breathed faster and pressed his hands against his heart which had grown cold.

He thought that he could distinguish on the lower terrace a white spot, and he wished to think that she was sitting there now, this strange woman, who had suddenly become so mysterious, so incomprehensible, so attractive to him, and that she was looking out at the boat, sorrowful as he was, and with her own eyes full of tears. He imagined himself standing there on the balcony close beside her, not his self of to-day, but that of yesterday, of a week ago — that former self which would never return to him. And he was sorry, unbearably, achinply sorry for that phase of Hfe which had gone from him for ever and would never return, would never repeat itself. With an unusual distinctness, his eyes veiled in a rainbow-hke mist of tears, Anna Georgicvna's face rose in front of him, no longer victorious, or self-assured, but with a gentle, suppliant expression, self -accusing ; and she seemed to him now small, hurt, weak, and close to him, as though grafted on to his heart for ever.

And with these delicate, sad, compassionate sensations there was blended imperceptibly, like the aroma of a fine wine, the memory of her warm naked, arms, her voice trembling with sensual passion, her beautiful eyes glanc-

ing down to his Ups.

Hiding itself behind the trees and villas, then showing itself again for a moment, the gynaeceum receded further and further and then suddenly disappeared. Pressing his cheek against the taffrail, Voskresenski looked for a long time in that direction. All this, indeed, had passed like a shadow. He recalled the bitter verse of Solomon, and he cried. But these tears, the tears of youth, clear and light, and this sorrow, were blessed.

Below deck, in the saloon, the lunch bell sounded. A chattering, noisy student, whose acquaintance Voskresenski had made in the port, came up behind him, tapped him on the shoulder and shouted out gaily :

" I've been looking for you, my friend ; you have provisions, haven't you ? Let's have a glass of vodka."



THE QUEEN OF SPADES

Alexander Sergeievitch Pushkin

Project Gutenberg Etext *Most Interesting Stories of All Nations*
Edited by Julian Hawthorne

I

There was a card party at the rooms of Naroumoff, of the Horse Guards. The long winter night passed away imperceptibly, and it was five o'clock in the morning before the company sat down to supper. Those who had won ate with a good appetite; the others sat staring absently at their empty plates. When the champagne appeared, however, the conversation became more animated, and all took a part in it.

"And how did you fare, Souirin?" asked the host.

"Oh, I lost, as usual. I must confess that I am unlucky. I play mirandole, I always keep cool, I never allow anything to put me out, and yet I always lose!"

"And you did not once allow yourself to be tempted to back the red? Your firmness astonishes me."

"But what do you think of Hermann?" said one of the guests, pointing to a young engineer. "He has never had a card in his hand in his life, he has never in his life laid a wager; and yet he sits here till five o'clock in the morning watching our play."

"Play interests me very much," said Hermann, "but I am not in the position to sacrifice the necessary in the hope of winning the superfluous."

"Hermann is a German; he is economical--that is all!" observed Tomsky. "But if there is one person that I cannot understand, it is my grandmother, the Countess Anna Fedorovna!"

"How so?" inquired the guests.

"I cannot understand," continued Tomsky, "how it is that my grandmother does not punt."

"Then you do not know the reason why?"

"No, really; I haven't the faintest idea. But let me tell you the story. You must know that about sixty years ago my grandmother went to Paris, where she created quite a sensation. People used to run after her to catch a glimpse of the 'Muscovite Venus.' Richelieu made love to her, and my grandmother maintains that he almost blew out his brains in consequence of her cruelty. At that time ladies used to play at faro. On one occasion at the Court, she lost a very considerable sum to the Duke of Orleans. On returning home, my grandmother removed the patches from her face, took off her hoops, informed my grandfather of her loss at the gaming-table, and ordered him to pay the money. My deceased grandfather, as far as I remember, was a sort of house-steward to my grandmother. He dreaded her like fire; but, on hearing of such a heavy loss, he almost went out of his mind. He calculated the various sums she had lost, and pointed out to her that in six months she had spent half a million of francs; that neither their Moscow nor Saratoff estates were in Paris; and, finally, refused point-blank to pay the debt. My grandmother gave him a box on the ear and slept by herself as a sign of her displeasure. The next day she sent for her husband, hoping that this domestic punishment had produced an effect upon him, but she found him inflexible. For the first time in her life she entered into reasonings and explanations with him, thinking to be able to convince him by pointing out to him that there are debts and debts, and that there

is a great difference between a prince and a coachmaker.

"But it was all in vain, my grandfather still remained obdurate. But the matter did not rest there. My grandmother did not know what to do. She had shortly before become acquainted with a very remarkable man. You have heard of Count St. Germain, about whom so many marvelous stories are told. You know that he represented himself as the Wandering Jew, as the discoverer of the elixir of life, of the philosopher's stone, and so forth. Some laughed at him as a charlatan; but Casnova, in his memoirs, says that he was a spy. But be that as it may, St. Germain, in spite of the mystery surrounding him, was a very fascinating person, and was much sought after in the best circles of society. Even to this day my grandmother retains an affectionate recollection of him, and becomes quite angry if anyone speaks disrespectfully of him. My grandmother knew that St. Germain had large sums of money at his disposal. She resolved to have recourse to him, and she wrote a letter to him asking him to come to her without delay. The queer old man immediately waited upon her, and found her overwhelmed with grief. She described to him in the blackest colors the barbarity of her husband, and ended by declaring that her whole hope depended upon his friendship and amiability.

"St. Germain reflected.

"'I could advance you the sum you want,' said he, 'but I know that you would not rest easy until you had paid me back, and I should not like to bring fresh troubles upon you. But there is another way of getting out of your difficuity: you can win back your money.'

"'But, my dear Count,' replied my grandmother, 'I tell you that I haven't any money left!'

"'Money is not necessary,' replied St. Germain, 'be pleased to listen to me.'

"Then he revealed to her a secret, for which each of us would give a good deal."

The young officers listened with increased attention. Tomsky lit his pipe, puffed away for a moment, and then continued:

"That same evening my grandmother went to Versailles to the jeu de la reine. The Duke of Orleans kept the bank; my grandmother excused herself in an offhanded manner for not having yet paid her debt by inventing some little story, and then began to play against him. She chose three cards and played them one after the other;

all three won sonika,* and my grandmother recovered every farthing that she lost."

* Said of a card when it wins or loses in the quickest possible time.

"Mere chance!" said one of the guests.

"A tale!" observed Hermann.

"Perhaps they were marked cards!" said a third.

"I do not think so," replied Tomsky, gravely.

"What!" said Naroumoff, "you have a grandmother who knows how to hit upon three lucky cards in succession, and you have never yet succeeded in getting the secret of it out of her?"

"That's the deuce of it!" replied Tomsky, "she had four sons, one of whom was my father; all four were determined gamblers, and yet not to one of them did she ever reveal her secret, although it would not have been a bad thing either for them or for me. But this is what I heard from my uncle, Count Ivan Ilitch, and he assured me, on his honor, that it was true. The late Chaplitsky--the same who died in poverty after having squandered millions--once lost, in his youth, about three hundred thousand roubles--to Zoritch, if I remember rightly. He was in despair. My grandmother, who was always very severe upon the extravagance of young men, took pity, however, upon Chaplitsky. She gave him three cards telling him to play them one after the other, at the same time exacting from him a solemn promise that he would never play at cards again as long as he lived. Chaplitsky then went to his victorious opponent, and they began a fresh game. On the first card he staked fifty thousand roubles, and won sonika; he doubled the stake, and won again; till at last, by pursuing the same tactics, he won back more than he had lost."

"But it is time to go to bed, it is a quarter to six already."
And, indeed, it was already beginning to dawn; the young men emptied their glasses and then took leave of each other.

II

The old Countess A---- was seated in her dressing-room in front of

her looking-glass. Three waiting maids stood around her. One held a small pot of rouge, another a box of hairpins, and the third a tall cap with bright red ribbons. The Countess had no longer the slightest pretensions to beauty, but she still preserved the habits of her youth, dressed in strict accordance with the fashion of seventy years before, and made as long and as careful a toilette as she would have done sixty years previously. Near the window, at an embroidery frame, sat a young lady, her ward.

"Good-morning, grandmamma," said a young officer, entering the room. "Bonjour, Mademoiselle Lise. Grandmamma, I want to ask you something."

"What is it, Paul?"

"I want you to let me introduce one of my friends to you, and to allow me to bring him to the ball on Friday."

"Bring him direct to the ball and introduce him to me there. Were you at B----'s yesterday?"

"Yes; everything went off very pleasantly, and dancing was kept up until five o'clock. How charming Eletskaia was!"

"But, my dear, what is there charming about her? Isn't she like her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna? By the way, she must be very old, the Princess Daria Petrovna?"

"How do you mean, old?" cried Tomsky, thoughtlessly, "she died seven years ago."

The young lady raised her head, and made a sign to the young officer. He then remembered that the old Countess was never to be informed of the death of her contemporaries, and he bit his lips. But the old Countess heard the news with the greatest indifference.

"Dead!" said she, "and I did not know it. We were appointed maids of honor at the same time, and when we were presented to the Empress--"

And the Countess for the hundredth time related to her grandson one of her anecdotes.

"Come, Paul," said she, when she had finished her story, "help me to get up. Lizanka,* where is my snuffbox?"

* Diminutive of Lizaveta (Elizabeth).

And the Countess with her three maids went behind a screen to finish her toilette. Tomsky was left alone with the young lady.

"Who is the gentleman you wish to introduce to the Countess?" asked Lizaveta Ivanovna in a whisper.

"Naroumoff. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he a soldier or a civilian?"

"A soldier."

"Is he in the Engineers?"

"No, in the Cavalry. What made you think that he was in the Engineers?"

The young lady smiled, but made no reply.

"Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me some new novel, only pray don't let it be one of the present day style."

"What do you mean, grandmother?"

"That is, a novel, in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which there are no drowned bodies. I have a great horror of drowned persons."

"There are no such novels nowadays. Would you like a Russian one?"

"Are there any Russian novels? Send me one, my dear, pray send me one!"

"Good-by, grandmother. I am in a hurry. . . . Goodby, Lizavetta Ivanovna. What made you think that Naroumoff was in the Engineers?"

And Tomsky left the boudoir.

Lizaveta Ivanovna was left alone. She laid aside her work, and began to look out of the window. A few moments afterwards, at a corner house on the other side of the street, a young officer appeared. A deep flush covered her cheeks; she took up her work again, and bent her head down over the frame. At the same moment the Countess returned, completely dressed.

"Order the carriage, Lizaveta," said she, "we will go out for a drive."

Lizaveta rose from the frame, and began to arrange her work.

"What is the matter with you, my child, are you deaf?" cried the Countess. "Order the carriage to be got ready at once."

"I will do so this moment," replied the young lady, hastening into the anteroom.

A servant entered and gave the Countess some books from Prince Paul Alexandrovitch.

"Tell him that I am much obliged to him," said the Countess. "Lizaveta! Lizaveta! where are you running to?"

"I am going to dress."

"There is plenty of time, my dear. Sit down here. Open the first volume and read to me aloud."

Her companion took the book and read a few lines.

"Louder," said the Countess. "What is the matter with you, my child? Have you lost your voice? Wait--Give me that footstool--a little nearer--that will do!"

Lizaveta read two more pages. The Countess yawned.

"Put the book down," said she, "what a lot of nonsense! Send it back to Prince Paul with my thanks. . . . But where is the carriage?"

"The carriage is ready," said Lizaveta, looking out into the street.

"How is it that you are not dressed?" said the Countess. "I must always wait for you. It is intolerable, my dear!"

Liza hastened to her room. She had not been there two minutes before the Countess began to ring with all her might. The three waiting-maids came running in at one door, and the valet at another.

"How is it that you cannot hear me when I ring for you?" said the Countess. "Tell Lizaveta Ivanovna that I am waiting for her."

Lizaveta returned with her hat and cloak on.

"At last you are here!" said the Countess. "But why such an elaborate toilette? Whom do you intend to captivate? What sort of weather is it? It seems rather windy."

"No, your Ladyship, it is very calm," replied the valet.

"You never think of what you are talking about. Open the window. So it is; windy and bitterly cold. Unharness the horses, Lizaveta, we won't go out--there was no need to deck yourself like that."

"What a life is mine!" thought Lizaveta Ivanovna.

And, in truth, Lizaveta Ivanovna was a very unfortunate creature. "The bread of the stranger is bitter," says Dante, "and his staircase hard to climb." But who can know what the bitterness of dependence is so well as the poor companion of an old lady of quality? The Countess A---- had by no means a bad heart, but she was capricious, like a woman who had been spoiled by the world, as well as being avaricious and egotistical, like all old people, who have seen their best days, and whose thoughts are with the past, and not the present. She participated in all the vanities of the great world, went to balls, where she sat in a corner, painted and dressed in old-fashioned style, like a deformed but indispensable ornament of the ballroom; all the guests on entering approached her and made a profound bow, as if in accordance with a set ceremony, but after that nobody took any further notice of her. She received the whole town at her house, and observed the strictest etiquette, although she could no longer recognize the faces of people. Her numerous domestics, growing fat and old in her antechamber and servants' hall, did just as they liked, and vied with each other in robbing the aged Countess in the most bare-faced manner. Lizaveta Ivanovna was the martyr of the household. She made tea, and was reproached with using too much sugar; she read novels aloud to the Countess, and the faults of the author were visited upon her head; she accompanied the Countess in her walks, and was held answerable for the weather or the state of the pavement. A salary was attached to the post, but she very rarely received it, although she was expected to dress like everybody else, that is to say, like very few indeed. In society she played the most pitiable role. Everybody knew her, and nobody paid her any attention. At balls she danced only when a partner was wanted, and ladies would only take hold of her arm when it was necessary to lead her out of the room to attend to their dresses. She was very self-conscious, and felt her position keenly, and she looked about her with impatience for a deliverer to come to her rescue; but the young men, calculating in their giddiness, honored her with but very little

attention, although Lizaveta Ivanovna was a hundred times prettier than the bare-faced, cold-hearted marriageable girls around whom they hovered. Many a time did she quietly slink away from the glittering, but wearisome, drawing-room, to go and cry in her own poor little room, in which stood a screen, a chest of drawers, a looking-glass, and a painted bedstead, and where a tallow candle burnt feebly in a copper candle-stick.

One morning--this was about two days after the evening party described at the beginning of this story, and a week previous to the scene at which we have just assisted--Lizaveta Ivanovna was seated near the window at her embroidery frame, when, happening to look out into the street, she caught sight of a young Engineer officer, standing motionless with his eyes fixed upon her window. She lowered her head, and went on again with her work. About five minutes afterwards she looked out again--the young officer was still standing in the same place. Not being in the habit of coquetting with passing officers, she did not continue to gaze out into the street, but went on sewing for a couple of hours, without raising her head. Dinner was announced. She rose up and began to put her embroidery away, but glancing casually out of the window, she perceived the officer again. This seemed to her very strange. After dinner she went to the window with a certain feeling of uneasiness, but the officer was no longer there--and she thought no more about him.

A couple of days afterwards, just as she was stepping into the carriage with the Countess, she saw him again. He was standing close behind the door, with his face half-concealed by his fur collar, but his dark eyes sparkled beneath his cap. Lizaveta felt alarmed, though she knew not why, and she trembled as she seated herself in the carriage.

On returning home, she hastened to the window--the officer was standing in his accustomed place, with his eyes fixed upon her. She drew back, a prey to curiosity, and agitated by a feeling which was quite new to her.

From that time forward not a day passed without the young officer making his appearance under the window at the customary hour, and between him and her there was established a sort of mute acquaintance. Sitting in her place at work, she used to feel his approach, and, raising her head, she would look at him longer and longer each day. The young man seemed to be very grateful to her; she saw with the sharp eye of youth, how a sudden flush covered his pale cheeks each time that their glances met. After about a week she commenced to smile at him. . . .

When Tomsky asked permission of his grandmother, the Countess, to present one of his friends to her, the young girl's heart beat violently. But hearing that Naroumoff was not an Engineer, she regretted that by her thoughtless question, she had betrayed her secret to the volatile Tomsky.

Hermann was the son of a German who had become a naturalized Russian, and from whom he had inherited a small capital. Being firmly convinced of the necessity of preserving his independence, Hermann did not touch his private income, but lived on his pay, without allowing himself the slightest luxury. Moreover, he was reserved and ambitious, and his companions rarely had an opportunity of making merry at the expense of his extreme parsimony. He had strong passions and an ardent imagination, but his firmness of disposition preserved him from the ordinary errors of young men. Thus, though a gamester at heart, he never touched a card, for he considered his position did not allow him--as he said--"to risk the necessary in the hope of winning the superfluous," yet he would sit for nights together at the card table and follow with feverish anxiety the different turns of the game.

The story of the three cards had produced a powerful impression upon his imagination, and all night long he could think of nothing else. "If," he thought to himself the following evening, as he walked along the streets of St. Petersburg, "if the old Countess would not reveal her secret to me! If she would only tell me the names of the three winning cards. Why should I not try my fortune? I must get introduced to her and win her favor--become her lover. . . . But all that will take time, and she is eighty-seven years old. She might be dead in a week, in a couple of days even. But the story itself? Can it really be true? No! Economy, temperance, and industry; those are my three winning cards; by means of them I shall be able to double my capital--increase it sevenfold, and procure for myself ease and independence."

Musing in this manner, he walked on until he found himself in one of the principal streets of St. Petersburg, in front of a house of antiquated architecture. The street was blocked with equipages; carriages one after the other drew up in front of the brilliantly illuminated doorway. At one moment there stepped out onto the pavement the well-shaped little foot of some young beauty, at another the heavy boot of a cavalry officer, and then the silk stockings and shoes of a member of the diplomatic world. Fur and cloaks passed in rapid succession before the gigantic porter at the entrance. Hermann stopped. "Whose house is this?" he asked of the watchman at the corner.

"The Countess A----'s," replied the watchman.

Hermann started. The strange story of the three cards again presented itself to his imagination. He began walking up and down before the house, thinking of its owner and her strange secret. Returning late to his modest lodging, he could not go to sleep for a long time, and when at last he did doze off, he could dream of nothing but cards, green tables, piles of banknotes, and heaps of ducats. He played one card after the other, winning uninterruptedly, and then he gathered up the gold and filled his pockets with the notes. When he woke up late the next morning, he sighed over the loss of his imaginary wealth, and then sallying out into the town, he found himself once more in front of the Countess's residence. Some unknown power seemed to have attracted him thither. He stopped and looked up at the windows. At one of these he saw a head with luxuriant black hair, which was bent down, probably over some book or an embroidery frame. The head was raised. Hermann saw a fresh complexion, and a pair of dark eyes. That moment decided his fate.

III

Lizaveta Ivanovna had scarcely taken off her hat and cloak, when the Countess sent for her, and again ordered her to get the carriage ready. The vehicle drew up before the door, and they prepared to take their seats. Just at the moment when two footmen were assisting the old lady to enter the carriage, Lizaveta saw her Engineer standing close beside the wheel; he grasped her hand; alarm caused her to lose her presence of mind, and the young man disappeared--but not before he had left a letter between her fingers. She concealed it in her glove, and during the whole of the drive she neither saw nor heard anything. It was the custom of the Countess, when out for an airing in her carriage, to be constantly asking such questions as "Who was that person that met us just now? What is the name of this bridge? What is written on that sign-board?" On this occasion, however, Lizaveta returned such vague and absurd answers, that the Countess became angry with her.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" she exclaimed. "Have you taken leave of your senses, or what is it? Do you not hear me or understand what I say? Heaven be thanked, I am still in my right mind and speak plainly enough!"

Lizaveta Ivanovna did not hear her. On returning home she ran to her room, and drew the letter out of her glove: it was not sealed. Lizaveta read it. The letter contained a declaration of love; it

was tender, respectful, and copied word for word from a German novel. But Lizaveta did not know anything of the German language, and she was quite delighted.

For all that, the letter caused her to feel exceedingly uneasy. For the first time in her life she was entering into secret and confidential relations with a young man. His boldness alarmed her. She reproached herself for her imprudent behavior, and knew not what to do. Should she cease to sit at the window, and, by assuming an appearance of indifference towards him, put a check upon the young officer's desire for further acquaintance with her? Should she send his letter back to him, or should she answer him in a cold and decided manner? There was nobody to whom she could turn in her perplexity, for she had neither female friend nor adviser. At length she resolved to reply to him.

She sat down at her little writing table, took pen and paper, and began to think. Several times she began her letter and then tore it up; the way she had expressed herself seemed to her either too inviting or too cold and decisive. At last she succeeded in writing a few lines with which she felt satisfied.

"I am convinced," she wrote, "that your intentions are honorable, and that you do not wish to offend me by any imprudent behavior, but our acquaintance must not begin in such a manner. I return you your letter, and I hope that I shall never have any cause to complain of this undeserved slight."

The next day, as soon as Hermann made his appearance, Lizaveta rose from her embroidery, went into the drawing-room, opened the ventilator, and threw the letter into the street, trusting that the young officer would have the perception to pick it up.

Hermann hastened forward, picked it up, and then repaired to a confectioner's shop. Breaking the seal of the envelope, he found inside it his own letter and Lizaveta's reply. He had expected this, and he returned home, his mind deeply occupied with his intrigue.

Three days afterwards a bright-eyed young girl from a milliner's establishment brought Lizaveta a letter. Lizaveta opened it with great uneasiness, fearing that it was a demand for money, when, suddenly, she recognized Hermann's handwriting.

"You have made a mistake, my dear," said she. "This letter is not for me."

"Oh, yes, it is for you," replied the girl, smiling very knowingly.

"Have the goodness to read it."

Lizaveta glanced at the letter. Hermann requested an interview.

"It cannot be," she cried, alarmed at the audacious request and the manner in which it was made. "This letter is certainly not for me," and she tore it into fragments.

"If the letter was not for you, why have you torn it up?" said the girl. "I should have given it back to the person who sent it."

"Be good enough, my dear," said Lizaveta, disconcerted by this remark, "not to bring me any more letters for the future, and tell the person who sent you that he ought to be ashamed."

But Hermann was not the man to be thus put off. Every day Lizaveta received from him a letter, sent now in this way, now in that. They were no longer translated from the German. Hermann wrote them under the inspiration of passion, and spoke in his own language, and they bore full testimony to the inflexibility of his desire, and the disordered condition of his uncontrollable imagination. Lizaveta no longer thought of sending them back to him; she became intoxicated with them, and began to reply to them, and little by little her answers became longer and more affectionate. At last she threw out of the window to him the following letter:

"This evening there is going to be a ball at the Embassy. The Countess will be there. We shall remain until two o'clock. You have now an opportunity of seeing me alone. As soon as the Countess is gone, the servants will very probably go out, and there will be nobody left but the Swiss, but he usually goes to sleep in his lodge. Come about half-past eleven. Walk straight upstairs. If you meet anybody in the anteroom, ask if the Countess is at home. You will be told 'No,' in which case there will be nothing left for you to do but to go away again. But it is most probable that you will meet nobody. The maidservants will all be together in one room. On leaving the anteroom, turn to the left, and walk straight on until you reach the Countess's bedroom. In the bedroom, behind a screen, you will find two doors: the one on the right leads to a cabinet, which the Countess never enters; the one on the left leads to a corridor, at the end of which is a little winding staircase; this leads to my room."

Hermann trembled like a tiger as he waited for the appointed time to arrive. At ten o'clock in the evening he was already in front of the Countess's house. The weather was terrible; the wind blew with great violence, the sleety snow fell in large flakes, the lamps emitted a feeble light, the streets were deserted; from time

to time a sledge drawn by a sorry-looking hack, passed by on the lookout for a belated passenger. Hermann was enveloped in a thick overcoat, and felt neither wind nor snow.

At last the Countess's carriage drew up. Hermann saw two footmen carry out in their arms the bent form of the old lady, wrapped in sable fur, and immediately behind her, clad in a warm mantle, and with her head ornamented with a wreath of fresh flowers, followed Lizaveta. The door was closed. The carriage rolled heavily away through the yielding snow. The porter shut the street door, the windows became dark.

Hermann began walking up and down near the deserted house; at length he stopped under a lamp, and glanced at his watch: it was twenty minutes past eleven. He remained standing under the lamp, his eyes fixed upon the watch impatiently waiting for the remaining minutes to pass. At half-past eleven precisely Hermann ascended the steps of the house and made his way into the brightly-illuminated vestibule. The porter was not there. Hermann hastily ascended the staircase, opened the door of the anteroom, and saw a footman sitting asleep in an antique chair by the side of a lamp. With a light, firm step Hermann passed by him. The drawing-room and dining-room were in darkness, but a feeble reflection penetrated thither from the lamp in the anteroom.

Hermann reached the Countess's bedroom. Before a shrine, which was full of old images, a golden lamp was burning. Faded stuffed chairs and divans with soft cushions stood in melancholy symmetry around the room, the walls of which were hung with china silk. On one side of the room hung two portraits painted in Paris by Madame Lebrun. One of these represented a stout, red-faced man of about forty years of age, in a bright green uniform, and with a star upon his breast; the other--a beautiful young woman, with an aquiline nose, forehead curls, and a rose in her powdered hair. In the corner stood porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses, dining-room clocks from the workshop of the celebrated Lefroy, bandboxes, roulettes, fans, and the various playthings for the amusement of ladies that were in vogue at the end of the last century, when Montgolfier's balloons and Niesber's magnetism were the rage. Hermann stepped behind the screen. At the back of it stood a little iron bedstead; on the right was the door which led to the cabinet; on the left, the other which led to the corridor. He opened the latter, and saw the little winding staircase which led to the room of the poor companion. But he retraced his steps and entered the dark cabinet.

The time passed slowly. All was still. The clock in the drawing-room struck twelve, the strokes echoed through the room one after

the other, and everything was quiet again. Hermann stood leaning against the cold stove. He was calm, his heart beat regularly, like that of a man resolved upon a dangerous but inevitable undertaking. One o'clock in the morning struck; then two, and he heard the distant noise of carriage-wheels. An involuntary agitation took possession of him. The carriage drew near and stopped. He heard the sound of the carriage steps being let down. All was bustle within the house. The servants were running hither and thither, there was a confusion of voices, and the rooms were lit up. Three antiquated chambermaids entered the bedroom, and they were shortly afterwards followed by the Countess, who, more dead than alive, sank into a Voltaire armchair. Hermann peeped through a chink. Lizaveta Ivanovna passed close by him, and he heard her hurried steps as she hastened up the little spiral staircase. For a moment his heart was assailed by something like a pricking of conscience, but the emotion was only transitory, and his heart became petrified as before.

The Countess began to undress before her looking-glass. Her rose-bedecked cap was taken off, and then her powdered wig was removed from off her white and closely cut hair. Hairpins fell in showers around her. Her yellow satin dress, brocaded with silver, fell down at her swollen feet.

Hermann was a witness of the repugnant mysteries of her toilette; at last the Countess was in her night-cap and dressing-gown, and in this costume, more suitable to her age, she appeared less hideous and deformed.

Like all old people, in general, the Countess suffered from sleeplessness. Having undressed, she seated herself at the window in a Voltaire armchair, and dismissed her maids. The candles were taken away, and once more the room was left with only one lamp burning in it. The Countess sat there looking quite yellow, mumbling with her flaccid lips and swaying to and fro. Her dull eyes expressed complete vacancy of mind, and, looking at her, one would have thought that the rocking of her body was not a voluntary action of her own, but was produced by the action of some concealed galvanic mechanism.

Suddenly the death-like face assumed an inexplicable expression. The lips ceased to tremble, the eyes became animated: before the Countess stood an unknown man.

"Do not be alarmed, for Heaven's sake, do not be alarmed!" said he in a low but distinct voice. "I have no intention of doing you any harm; I have only come to ask a favor of you."

The old woman looked at him in silence, as if she had not heard what he had said. Hermann thought that she was deaf, and, bending down towards her ear, he repeated what he had said. The aged Countess remained silent as before.

"You can insure the happiness of my life," continued Hermann, "and it will cost you nothing. I know that you can name three cards in order--"

Hermann stopped. The Countess appeared now to understand what he wanted; she seemed as if seeking for words to reply.

"It was a joke," she replied at last. "I assure you it was only a joke."

"There is no joking about the matter," replied Hermann, angrily. "Remember Chaplitsky, whom you helped to win."

The Countess became visibly uneasy. Her features expressed strong emotion, but they quickly resumed their former immobility.

"Can you not name me these three winning cards?" continued Hermann.

The Countess remained silent; Hermann continued:

"For whom are you preserving your secret? For your grandsons? They are rich enough without it, they do not know the worth of money. Your cards would be of no use to a spendthrift. He who cannot preserve his paternal inheritance will die in want, even though he had a demon at his service. I am not a man of that sort. I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be thrown away upon me. Come!"

He paused and tremblingly awaited her reply. The Countess remained silent. Hermann fell upon his knees.

"If your heart has ever known the feeling of love," said be, "if you remember its rapture, if you have ever smiled at the cry of your new-born child, if any human feeling has ever entered into your breast, I entreat you by the feelings of a wife, a lover, a mother, by all that is most sacred in life, not to reject my prayer. Reveal to me your secret. Of what use is it to you? May be it is connected with some terrible sin, with the loss of eternal salvation, with some bargain with the devil. Reflect, you are old, you have not long to live--I am ready to take your sins upon my soul. Only reveal to me your secret. Remember that the happiness of a man is in your hands, that not only I, but my children and my grandchildren, will bless your memory and reverence you as a

saint."

The old Countess answered not a word.

Hermann rose to his feet.

"You old hag!" he exclaimed, grinding his teeth, "then I will make you answer!" With these words he drew a pistol from his pocket. At the sight of the pistol, the Countess for the second time exhibited strong emotions. She shook her head, and raised her hands as if to protect herself from the shot. Then she fell backwards, and remained motionless.

"Come, an end to this childish nonsense!" said Hermann, taking hold of her hand. "I ask you for the last time: will you tell me the names of your three cards, or will you not?"

The Countess made no reply. Hermann perceived that she was dead!

IV

Lizaveta Ivanovna was sitting in her room, still in her ball dress, lost in deep thought. On returning home, she had hastily dismissed the chambermaid, who very reluctantly came forward to assist her, saying that she would undress herself, and with a trembling heart had gone up to her own room, expecting to find Hermann there, but yet hoping not to find him. At the first glance he was not there, and she thanked her fate for having prevented him keeping the appointment. She sat down without undressing, and began to call to mind all the circumstances which in a short time had carried her so far. It was not three weeks since the time when she had first seen the young officer from the window--and yet she was already in correspondence with him, and he had succeeded in inducing her to grant him a nocturnal interview. She knew his name only through his having written it at the bottom of some of his letters; she had never spoken to him, had never heard his voice, and had never heard him spoken of until that evening. But, strange to say, that very evening at the ball, Tomsky, being piqued with the young Princess Pauline N----, who, contrary to her usual custom, did not flirt with him, wished to revenge himself by assuming an air of indifference: he therefore engaged Lizaveta Ivanovna, and danced an endless mazurka with her. During the whole of the time he kept teasing her about her partiality for Engineer officers, he assured her that he knew far more than she imagined, and some of his jests were so happily aimed, that Lizaveta thought several times that her secret was known to him.

"From whom have you learned all this?" she asked, smiling.

"From a friend of a person very well known to you," replied Tomsky, "from a very distinguished man."

"And whom is this distinguished man?"

"His name is Hermann." Lizaveta made no reply, but her hands and feet lost all sense of feeling.

"This Hermann," continued Tomsky, "is a man of romantic personality. He has the profile of a Napoleon, and the soul of a Mephistopheles. I believe that he has at least three crimes upon his conscience. How pale you have become!"

"I have a headache. But what did this Hermann, or whatever his name is, tell you?"

"Hermann is very dissatisfied with his friend. He says that in his place he would act very differently. I even think that Hermann himself has designs upon you; at least, he listens very attentively to all that his friend has to say about you."

"And where has he seen me?"

"In church, perhaps; or on the parade. God alone knows where. It may have been in your room, while you were asleep, for there is nothing that he--"

Three ladies approaching him with the question: "oubli ou regret?" interrupted the conversation, which had become so tantalizingly interesting to Lizaveta.

The lady chosen by Tomsky was the Princess Pauline herself. She succeeded in effecting a reconciliation with him during the numerous turns of the dance, after which he conducted her to her chair. On returning to his place, Tomsky thought no more either of Hermann or Lizaveta. She longed to renew the interrupted conversation, but the mazurka came to an end, and shortly afterwards the old Countess took her departure.

Tomsky's words were nothing more than the customary small talk of the dance, but they sank deep into the soul of the young dreamer. The portrait, sketched by Tomsky, coincided with the picture she had formed within her own mind, and, thanks to the latest romances, the ordinary countenance of her admirer became invested with attributes capable of alarming her and fascinating her imagination

at the same time. She was now sitting with her bare arms crossed, and with her head, still adorned with flowers, sunk upon her uncovered bosom. Suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She shuddered.

"Where were you?" she asked in a terrified whisper.

"In the old Countess's bedroom," replied Hermann. "I have just left her. The Countess is dead."

"My God! What do you say?"

"And I am afraid," added Hermann, "that I am the cause of her death."

Lizaveta looked at him, and Tomsky's words found an echo in her soul: "This man has at least three crimes upon his conscience!" Hermann sat down by the window near her, and related all that had happened.

Lizaveta listened to him in terror. So all those passionate letters, those ardent desires, this bold, obstinate pursuit--all this was not love! Money--that was what his soul yearned for! She could not satisfy his desire and make him happy. The poor girl had been nothing but the blind tool of a robber, of the murderer of her aged benefactress! She wept bitter tears of agonized repentance. Hermann gazed at her in silence; his heart, too, was a prey to violent emotion, but neither the tears of the poor girl, nor the wonderful charm of her beauty, enhanced by her grief, could produce any impression upon his hardened soul. He felt no pricking of conscience at the thought of the dead old woman. One thing only grieved him: the irreparable loss of the secret from which he had expected to obtain great wealth.

"You are a monster!" said Lizaveta at last.

"I did not wish for her death," replied Hermann, "my pistol was not loaded." Both remained silent. The day began to dawn. Lizaveta extinguished her candle, a pale light illumined her room. She wiped her tear-stained eyes, and raised them towards Hermann. He was sitting near the window, with his arms crossed, and with a fierce frown upon his forehead. In this attitude he bore a striking resemblance to the portrait of Napoleon. This resemblance struck Lizaveta even.

"How shall I get you out of the house?" said she at last. "I thought of conducting you down the secret staircase."

"I will go alone," he answered.

Lizaveta arose, took from her drawer a key, handed it to Hermann, and gave him the necessary instructions. Hermann pressed her cold, inert hand, kissed her bowed head, and left the room.

He descended the winding staircase, and once more entered the Countess's bedroom. The dead old lady sat as if petrified, her face expressed profound tranquillity. Hermann stopped before her, and gazed long and earnestly at her, as if he wished to convince himself of the terrible reality. At last he entered the cabinet, felt behind the tapestry for the door, and then began to descend the dark staircase, filled with strange emotions. "Down this very staircase," thought he, "perhaps coming from the very same room, and at this very same hour sixty years ago, there may have glided, in an embroidered coat, with his hair dressed a l'oiseau royal, and pressing to his heart his three-cornered hat, some young gallant who has long been mouldering in the grave, but the heart of his aged mistress has only today ceased to beat."

At the bottom of the staircase Hermann found a door, which he opened with a key, and then traversed a corridor which conducted him into the street.

V

Three days after the fatal night, at nine o'clock in the morning, Hermann repaired to the Convent of -----, where the last honors were to be paid to the mortal remains of the old Countess. Although feeling no remorse, he could not altogether stifle the voice of conscience, which said to him: "You are the murderer of the old woman!" In spite of his entertaining very little religious belief, he was exceedingly superstitions; and believing that the dead Countess might exercise an evil influence on his life, he resolved to be present at her obsequies in order to implore her pardon.

The church was full. It was with difficulty that Hermann made his way through the crowd of people. The coffin was placed upon a rich catafalque beneath a velvet baldachin. The deceased Countess lay within it, with her hands crossed upon her breast, with a lace cap upon her head, and dressed in a white satin robe. Around the catafalque stood the members of her household; the servants in black caftans, with armorial ribbons upon their shoulders and candles in their hands; the relatives--children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren--in deep mourning.

Nobody wept, tears would have been an affectation. The Countess was so old that her death could have surprised nobody, and her relatives had long looked upon her as being out of the world. A famous preacher delivered the funeral sermon. In simple and touching words he described the peaceful passing away of the righteous, who had passed long years in calm preparation for a Christian end. "The angel of death found her," said the orator, "engaged in pious meditation and waiting for the midnight bridegroom."

The service concluded amidst profound silence. The relatives went forward first to take a farewell of the corpse. Then followed the numerous guests, who had come to render the last homage to her who for so many years had been a participator in their frivolous amusements. After these followed the members of the Countess's household. The last of these an old woman of the same age as the deceased. Two young women led her forward by the hand. She had not strength enough to bow down to the ground--she merely shed a few tears, and kissed the cold hand of the mistress.

Herman now resolved to approach the coffin. He knelt down upon the cold stones, and remained in that position for some minutes; at last he arose as pale as the deceased Countess herself; he ascended the steps of the catafalque and bent over the corpse. . . . At that moment it seemed to him that the dead woman darted a mocking look at him and winked with one eye. Hermann started back, took a false step, and fell to the ground. Several persons hurried forward and raised him up. At the same moment Lizaveta Ivanovna was borne fainting into the porch of the church. This episode disturbed for some minutes the solemnity of the gloomy ceremony. Among the congregation arose a deep murmur, and a tall, thin chamberlain, a near relative of the deceased, whispered in the ear of an Englishman, who was standing near him, that the young officer was a natural son of the Countess, to which the Englishman coldly replied "Oh!"

During the whole of that day Hermann was strangely excited. Repairing to an out of the way restaurant to dine, be drank a great deal of wine, contrary to his usual custom, in the hope of deadening his inward agitation. But the wine only served to excite his imagination still more. On returning home he threw himself upon his bed without undressing, and fell into a deep sleep.

When he woke up it was already night, and the moon was shining into the room. He looked at his watch: it was a quarter to three. Sleep had left him; he sat down upon his bed, and thought of the funeral of the old Countess.

At that moment somebody in the street looked in at his window and immediately passed on again. Hermann paid no attention to this incident. A few moments afterwards he heard the door of his anteroom open. Hermann thought that it was his orderly, drunk as usual, returning from some nocturnal expedition, but presently he heard footsteps that were unknown to him: somebody was walking softly over the floor in slippers. The door opened, and a woman dressed in white entered the room. Hermann mistook her for his old nurse, and wondered what could bring her there at that hour of the night. But the white woman glided rapidly across the room and stood before him--and Hermann thought he recognized the Countess.

"I have come to you against my wish," she said in a firm voice, "but I have been ordered to grant your request. Three, seven, ace, will win for you if played in succession, but only on these conditions: that you do not play more than one card in twenty-four-hours, and that you never play again during the rest of your life. I forgive you my death, on condition that you marry my companion, Lizaveta Ivanovna."

With these words she turned round very quietly, walked with a shuffling gait towards the door, and disappeared. Hermann heard the street door open and shut, and again he saw someone look in at him through the window.

For a long time Hermann could not recover himself. He then rose up and entered the next room. His orderly was lying asleep upon the floor, and he had much difficulty in waking him. The orderly was drunk as usual, and no information could be obtained from him. The street door was locked. Hermann returned to his room, lit his candle, and wrote down all the details of his vision.

VI

Two fixed ideas can no more exist together in the moral world than two bodies can occupy one and the same physical world. "Three, seven, ace" soon drove out of Hermann's mind the thought of the dead Countess. "Three, seven, ace" were perpetually running through his head, and continually being repeated by his lips. If he saw a young girl, he would say: "How slender she is; quite like the three of hearts." If anybody asked "What is the time?" he would reply: "Five minutes to seven." Every stout man that he saw reminded him of the ace. "Three, seven, ace" haunted him in his sleep, and assumed all possible shapes. The threes bloomed before him in the forms of magnificent flowers, the sevens were

represented by Gothic portals, and the aces became transformed into gigantic spiders. One thought alone occupied his whole mind--to make a profitable use of the secret which he had purchased so dearly. He thought of applying for a furlough so as to travel abroad. He wanted to go to Paris and tempt fortune in some gambling houses that abounded there. Chance spared him all this trouble.

There was in Moscow a society of rich gamesters, presided over by the celebrated Chekalinsky, who had passed all his life at the card table, and had amassed millions, accepting bills of exchange for his winnings, and paying his losses in ready money. His long experience secured for him the confidence of his companions, and his open house, his famous cook, and his agreeable and fascinating manners, gained for him the respect of the public. He came to St. Petersburg. The young men of the capital flocked to his rooms, forgetting balls for cards, and preferring the emotions of faro to the seductions of flirting. Naroumoff conducted Hermann to Chekalinsky's residence.

They passed through a suite of rooms, filled with attentive domestics. The place was crowded. Generals and Privy Counsellors were playing at whist, young men were lolling carelessly upon the velvet-covered sofas, eating ices and smoking pipes. In the drawing-room, at the head of a long table, around which were assembled about a score of players, sat the master of the house keeping the bank. He was a man of about sixty years of age, of a very dignified appearance; his head was covered with silvery white hair; his full, florid countenance expressed good-nature, and his eyes twinkled with a perpetual smile. Naroumoff introduced Hermann to him. Chekalinsky shook him by the hand in a friendly manner, requested him not to stand on ceremony, and then went on dealing.

The game occupied some time. On the table lay more than thirty cards. Chekalinsky paused after each throw, in order to give the players time to arrange their cards and note down their losses, listened politely to their requests, and more politely still, straightened the corners of cards that some player's hand had chanced to bend. At last the game was finished. Chekalinsky shuffled the cards, and prepared to deal again.

"Will you allow me to take a card?" said Hermann, stretching out his hand from behind a stout gentleman who was punting.

Chekalinsky smiled and bowed silently, as a sign of acquiescence. Naroumoff laughingly congratulated Hermann on his abjuration of that abstention from cards which he had practised for so long a period, and wished him a lucky beginning.

"Stake!" said Hermann, writing some figures with chalk on the back of his card.

"How much?" asked the banker, contracting the muscles of his eyes, "excuse me, I cannot see quite clearly."

"Forty-seven thousand roubles," replied Hermann. At these words every head in the room turned suddenly round, and all eyes were fixed upon Hermann.

"He has taken leave of his senses!" thought Naroumoff.

"Allow me to inform you," said Chekalinsky, with his eternal smile, "that you are playing very high; nobody here has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five roubles at once."

"Very well," replied Hermann, "but do you accept my card or not?"

Chekalinsky bowed in token of consent.

"I only wish to observe," said he, "that although I have the greatest confidence in my friends, I can only play against ready money. For my own part I am quite convinced that your word is sufficient, but for the sake of the order of the game, and to facilitate the reckoning up, I must ask you to put the money on your card."

Hermann drew from his pocket a bank-note, and handed it to Chekalinsky, who, after examining it in a cursory manner, placed it on Hermann's card.

He began to deal. On the right a nine turned up, and on the left a three.

"I have won!" said Hermann, showing his card.

A murmur of astonishment arose among the players. Chekalinsky frowned, but the smile quickly returned to his face. "Do you wish me to settle with you?" he said to Hermann.

"If you please," replied the latter.

Chekalinsky drew from his pocket a number of banknotes and paid at once. Hermann took up his money and left the table. Naroumoff could not recover from his astonishment. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and returned home.

The next evening he again repaired to Chekalinsky's. The host was dealing. Hermann walked up to the table; the punters immediately made room for him. Chekalinsky greeted him with a gracious bow.

Hermann waited for the next deal, took a card and placed upon it his forty-seven thousand roubles, together with his winnings of the previous evening.

Chekalinsky began to deal. A knave turned up on the right, a seven on the left.

Hermann showed his seven.

There was a general exclamation. Chekalinsky was evidently ill at ease, but he counted out the ninety-four thousand roubles and handed them over to Hermann, who pocketed them in the coolest manner possible, and immediately left the house.

The next evening Hermann appeared again at the table. Everyone was expecting him. The generals and privy counsellors left their whist in order to watch such extraordinary play. The young officers quitted their sofas, and even the servants crowded into the room. All pressed round Hermann. The other players left off punting, impatient to see how it would end. Hermann stood at the table, and prepared to play alone against the pale, but still smiling Chekalinsky. Each opened a pack of cards. Chekalinsky shuffled. Hermann took a card and covered it with a pile of bank-notes. It was like a duel. Deep silence reigned around.

Chekalinsky began to deal, his hands trembled. On the right a queen turned up, and on the left an ace.

"Ace has won!" cried Hermann, showing his card.

"Your queen has lost," said Chekalinsky, politely.

Hermann started; instead of an ace, there lay before him the queen of spades! He could not believe his eyes, nor could he understand how he had made such a mistake.

At that moment it seemed to him that the queen of spades smiled ironically, and winked her eye at him. He was struck by her remarkable resemblance. . . .

"The old Countess!" he exclaimed, seized with terror. Chekalinsky gathered up his winnings. For some time Hermann remained perfectly motionless. When at last he left the table, there was a general commotion in the room.

"Splendidly punted!" said the players. Chekalinsky shuffled the cards afresh, and the game went on as usual.

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Hermann went out of his mind, and is now confined in room number seventeen of the Oboukhoff Hospital. He never answers any questions, but he constantly mutters with unusual rapidity: "Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, queen!"

Lizaveta Ivanovna has married a very amiable young man, a son of the former steward of the old Countess. He is in the service of the State somewhere, and is in receipt of a good income. Lizaveta is also supporting a poor relative.

Tomsky has been promoted to the rank of captain, and has become the husband of the Princess Pauline.



THE DOG

Project Gutenberg's *First love and other stories*, by Iván Turgénieff (1866)

“But if we can admit the possibility of the supernatural, the possibility of its intervention in real life,--then allow me to inquire, what rôle is sound judgment bound to play after this?”--shouted Antón Stepánitch, crossing his arms on his stomach.

Antón Stepánitch had held the rank of State Councillor, had served in some wonderful department, and, as his speech was interlarded with pauses and was slow and uttered in a bass voice, he enjoyed universal respect. Not long before the date of our story, “the good-for-nothing little Order of St. Stanislas had been stuck on him,” as those who envied him expressed it.

“That is perfectly just,”--remarked Skvorévitch.

“No one will dispute that,”--added Kinarévitch.

“I assent also,”--chimed in, in falsetto, from a corner the master of the house, Mr. Finopléntoff.

“But I, I must confess, cannot assent, because something supernatural has happened to me,”--said a man of medium stature and middle age, with a protruding abdomen and a bald spot, who had been sitting silent before the stove up to that moment. The glances of all present in the room were turned upon him with curiosity and surprise--and silence reigned.

This man was a landed proprietor of Kalúga, not wealthy, who had recently come to Petersburg. He had once served in the hussars, had gambled away his property, resigned from the service and settled down in the country. The recent agricultural changes had cut off his revenues, and he had betaken himself to the capital in search of a snug little position. He possessed no abilities, and had no influential connections; but he placed great reliance on the friendship of an old comrade in the service, who had suddenly, without rhyme or reason, become a person of importance, and whom he had once aided to administer a sound thrashing to a card-sharper. Over and above that he counted upon his own luck--and it had not betrayed him; several days later he obtained the post of inspector of government storehouses, a profitable, even honourable position which did not require extraordinary talents: the storehouses themselves existed only in contemplation, and no one even knew with certainty what they were to contain,--but they had been devised as a measure of governmental economy.

Antón Stepánitch was the first to break the general silence.

“What, my dear sir?”--he began. “Do you seriously assert that something supernatural--I mean to say, incompatible with the laws of nature--has happened to you?”

“I do,”--returned “my dear sir,” whose real name was Porfíry Kapítonitch.

“Incompatible with the laws of nature?”--energetically repeated Antón Stepánitch, who evidently liked that phrase.

“Precisely ... yes; precisely the sort of thing you allude to.”

“This is astonishing! What think you, gentlemen?”--Antón Stepánitch endeavoured to impart to his features an ironical expression, but without result--or, to speak more accurately, the only result was to produce the effect that Mr. State Councillor smelt a bad odour.--“Will not you be so kind, my dear sir,”--he went on, addressing the landed proprietor from Kalúga,--“as to communicate to us the particulars of such a curious event?”

“Why not? Certainly!”--replied the landed proprietor, and moving forward to the middle of the room in an easy manner he spoke as follows:

I have, gentlemen, as you are probably aware,--or as you may not be aware,--a small estate in Kozyól County. I formerly derived some profit from it--but now, of course, nothing but unpleasantness is to be anticipated. However, let us put politics aside! Well, sir, on that same estate I have a “wee little” manor: a vegetable garden, as is proper, a tiny pond with little carp, and some sort of buildings--well, and a small wing for my own sinful body.... I am a bachelor. So, sir, one day--about six years ago--I had returned home rather late; I had been playing cards at a neighbour’s house--but I beg you to observe, I was not tipsy, as the expression goes. I undressed, got into bed, and blew out the light. And just imagine, gentlemen; no sooner had I blown out the light, than something began to rummage under my bed! Is it a rat? I thought. No, it was not a rat: it clawed and fidgeted and scratched itself.... At last it began to flap its ears!

It was a dog--that was clear. But where had the dog come from? I keep none myself. “Can some stray animal have run in?” I thought. I called to my servant; his name is Fílka. The man entered with a candle.

“What’s this,”--says I,--“my good Fílka? How lax thou art! A dog has intruded himself under my bed.”

“What dog?”--says he.

“How should I know?”--says I;--“that’s thy affair--not to allow thy master to be disturbed.”

My Fílka bent down, and began to pass the candle about under the bed.

“Why,”--says he,--“there’s no dog here.”

I bent down also; in fact there was no dog.... Here was a marvel! I turned my eyes on Fílka: he was smiling.

“Fool,”--said I to him,--“what art thou grinning about? When thou didst open the door the dog probably took and sneaked out into the anteroom. But thou, gaper, didst notice nothing, because thou art eternally asleep. Can it be that thou thinkest I am drunk?”

He attempted to reply, but I drove him out, curled myself up in a ring, and heard nothing more that night.

But on the following night--just imagine!--the same thing was repeated. No sooner had I blown out the light than it began to claw and flap its

ears. Again I summoned Fílka, again he looked under the bed--again nothing! I sent him away, blew out the light--phew, damn it! there was the dog still. And a dog it certainly was: I could hear it breathing and rummaging in its hair with its teeth in search of fleas so plainly!

“Fílka!”--says I,--“come hither without a light!”... He entered....
“Well, now,”--says I, “dost thou hear?...”

“I do,”--said he. I could not see him, but I felt that the fellow was quailing.

“What dost thou make of it?”--said I.

“What dost thou command me to make of it, Porfíry Kapítonitch?... ’Tis an instigation of the Evil One!”

“Thou art a lewd fellow; hold thy tongue with thy instigation of the Evil One.”... But the voices of both of us were like those of birds, and we were shaking as though in a fever--in the darkness. I lighted a candle: there was no dog, and no noise whatever--only Fílka and I as white as clay. And I must inform you, gentlemen--you can believe me or not--but from that night forth for the space of six weeks the same thing went on. At last I even got accustomed to it and took to extinguishing my light because I cannot sleep with a light. “Let him fidget!” I thought. “It doesn’t harm me.”

“But--I see--that you do not belong to the cowardly squad,”--interrupted Antón Stepánitch, with a half-scornful, half-condescending laugh. “The hussar is immediately perceptible!”

“I should not be frightened at you, in any case,”--said Porfíry Kapítonitch, and for a moment he really did look like a hussar.--“But listen further.”

A neighbour came to me, the same one with whom I was in the habit of playing cards. He dined with me on what God had sent, and lost fifty rubles to me for his visit; night was drawing on--it was time for him to go. But I had calculations of my own:--“Stop and spend the night with me, Vasíly Vasílitch; to-morrow thou wilt win it back, God willing.”

My Vasíly Vasílitch pondered and pondered--and stayed. I ordered a bed to be placed for him in my own chamber.... Well, sir, we went to bed, smoked, chattered,--chiefly about the feminine sex, as is fitting in bachelor society,--and laughed, as a matter of course. I look; Vasíly Vasílitch has put out his candle and has turned his back on me; that signifies: “_Schlafen Sie wohl._” I waited a little and extinguished my candle also. And imagine: before I had time to think to myself, “What sort of performance will there be now?” my dear little animal began to

make a row. And that was not all; he crawled out from under the bed, walked across the room, clattering his claws on the floor, waggling his ears, and suddenly collided with a chair which stood by the side of Vasíly Vasílitch's bed!

"Porfíry Kapítonitch,"--says Vasíly Vasílitch, and in such an indifferent voice, you know,--"I didn't know that thou hadst taken to keeping a dog. What sort of an animal is it--a setter?"

"I have no dog,"--said I,--"and I never have had one."

"Thou hast not indeed! But what's this?"

"What is this?"--said I.--"See here now; light the candle and thou wilt find out for thyself."

"It isn't a dog?"

"No."

Vasíly Vasílitch turned over in bed.--"But thou art jesting, damn it?"

"No, I'm not jesting."--I hear him go scratch, scratch with a match, and that thing does not stop, but scratches its side. The flame flashed up ... and basta! There was not a trace of a dog! Vasíly Vasílitch stared at me--and I stared at him.

"What sort of a trick is this?"--said he.

"Why,"--said I,--"this is such a trick that if thou wert to set Socrates himself on one side and Frederick the Great on the other even they couldn't make head or tail of it."--And thereupon I told him all in detail. Up jumped my Vasíly Vasílitch as though he had been singed! He couldn't get into his boots.

"Horses!"--he yelled--"horses!"

I began to argue with him, but in vain. He simply groaned.

"I won't stay,"--he shouted,--"not a minute!--Of course, after this, thou art a doomed man!--Horses!..."

But I prevailed upon him. Only his bed was dragged out into another room--and night-lights were lighted everywhere. In the morning, at tea, he recovered his dignity; he began to give me advice.

"Thou shouldst try absenting thyself from the house for several days, Porfíry Kapítonitch," he said: "perhaps that vile thing would leave

thee."

But I must tell you that he--that neighbour of mine--had a capacious mind! he worked his mother-in-law so famously among other things: he palmed off a note of hand on her; which signifies that he chose the most vulnerable moment! She became like silk: she gave him a power of attorney over all her property--what more would you have? But that was a great affair--to twist his mother-in-law round his finger--wasn't it, hey? Judge for yourselves. But he went away from me somewhat discontented; I had punished him to the extent of another hundred rubles. He even swore at me: "Thou art ungrateful,"--he said, "thou hast no feeling;" but how was I to blame for that? Well, this is in parenthesis--but I took his suggestion under consideration. That same day I drove off to town and established myself in an inn, with an acquaintance, an old man of the Old Ritualist sect.[36]

He was a worthy old man, although a trifle harsh, because of loneliness: his whole family were dead. Only he did not favour tobacco at all,[37] and felt a great loathing for dogs; I believe, for example, that rather than admit a dog into the room he would have rent himself in twain! "For how is it possible?"--he said. "There in my room, on the wall, the Sovereign Lady herself deigns to dwell;[38] and shall a filthy dog thrust his accursed snout in there?"--That was ignorance, of course! However, this is my opinion: if any man has been vouchsafed wisdom, let him hold to it!

"But you are a great philosopher, I see,"--interrupted Antón Stepánitch again, with the same laugh as before.

This time Porfíry Kapítonitch even scowled.

"What sort of a philosopher I am no one knows,"--he said as his moustache twitched in a surly manner:--"but I would gladly take you as a pupil."

We all fairly bored our eyes into Antón Stepánitch; each one of us expected an arrogant retort or at least a lightning glance.... But Mr. State Councillor altered his smile from scorn to indifference, then yawned, dangled his foot--and that was all!

So then, I settled down at that old man's house--[went on Porfíry Kapítonitch].--He assigned me a room "for acquaintance's" sake,--not of the best; he himself lodged there also, behind a partition--and that was all I required. But what tortures I did undergo! The chamber was small, it was hot, stifling, and there were flies, and such sticky ones; in the corner was a remarkably large case for images, with ancient holy pictures; their garments were dim and puffed out; the air was fairly infected with olive-oil, and some sort of a spice in addition; on the

bedstead were two down beds; if you moved a pillow, out ran a cockroach from beneath it.... I drank an incredible amount of tea, out of sheer tedium--it was simply horrible! I got into bed; it was impossible to sleep.--And on the other side of the partition my host was sighing and grunting and reciting his prayers. I heard him begin to snore--and very lightly and courteously, in old-fashioned style. I had long since extinguished my candle--only the shrine-lamp was twinkling in front of the holy pictures.... A hindrance, of course! So I took and rose up softly, in my bare feet: I reached up to the lamp and blew it out.... Nothing happened.--"Aha!" I thought: "this means that he won't make a fuss in the house of strangers."... But no sooner had I lain down on the bed than the row began again! The thing clawed, and scratched himself and flapped his ears ... well, just as I wanted him to. Good! I lay there and waited to see what would happen. I heard the old man wake up.

"Master,"--said he,--"hey there, master?"

"What's wanted?"--said I.

"Was it thou who didst put out the shrine-lamp?"--And without awaiting my reply, he suddenly began to mumble:

"What's that? What's that? A dog? A dog? Akh, thou damned Nikonian!"[39]

"Wait a bit, old man,"--said I,--"before thou cursest; but it would be better for thee to come hither thyself. Things deserving of wonder are going on here,"--said I.

The old man fussed about behind the partition and entered my room with a candle, a slender one, of yellow wax; and I was amazed as I looked at him! He was all bristling, with shaggy ears and vicious eyes like those of a polecat; on his head was a small skull-cap of white felt; his beard reached to his girdle and was white also; and he had on a waistcoat with brass buttons over his shirt, and fur boots on his feet, and he disseminated an odour of juniper. In that condition he went up to the holy pictures, crossed himself thrice with two fingers[40] lighted the shrine-lamp, crossed himself again, and turning to me, merely grunted:

"Explain thyself!"

Thereupon, without the least delay, I communicated to him all the circumstances. The old man listened to all my explanations without uttering the smallest word; he simply kept shaking his head. Then he sat down on my bed, still maintaining silence. He scratched his breast, the back of his head, and other places, and still remained silent.

"Well, Feodúl Ivánitch,"--said I, "what is thy opinion: is this some

sort of visitation of the Evil One, thinkest thou?"

The old man stared at me.--"A pretty thing thou hast invented! A visitation of the Evil One, forsooth! 'Twould be all right at thy house, thou tobacco-user,--but 'tis quite another thing here! Only consider how many holy things there are here! And thou must needs have a visitation of the devil!--And if it isn't that, what is it?"

The old man relapsed into silence, scratched himself again, and at last he said, but in a dull sort of way, because his moustache kept crawling into his mouth:

"Go thou to the town of Byéleff. There is only one man who can help thee. And that man dwells in Byéleff;[41] he is one of our people. If he takes a fancy to help thee, that's thy good luck; if he doesn't take a fancy,--so it must remain."

"But how am I to find him?"--said I.

"We can give thee directions,"--said he;--"only why dost thou call this a visitation of the devil? 'Tis a vision, or a sign; but thou wilt not be able to comprehend it; 'tis not within thy flight. And now lie down and sleep under Christ's protection, dear little father; I will fumigate with incense; and in the morning we will take counsel together. The morning is wiser than the evening, thou knowest."

Well, sir, and we did take counsel together in the morning--only I came near choking to death with that same incense. And the old man instructed me after this wise: that when I had reached Byéleff I was to go to the public square, and in the second shop on the right inquire for a certain Prokhóritch; and having found Prokhóritch, I was to hand him a document. And the whole document consisted of a scrap of paper, on which was written the following: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. To Sergyéi Prokhóritch Pervúshin. Trust this man. Feodúly Ivánovitch." And below: "Send some cabbages, for God's sake."

I thanked the old man, and without further ado ordered my tarantás to be harnessed, and set off for Byéleff. For I argued in this way: admitting that my nocturnal visitor did not cause me much grief, still, nevertheless, it was not quite decorous for a nobleman and an officer--what do you think about it?

"And did you really go to Byéleff?"--whispered Mr. Finopléntoff.

I did, straight to Byéleff. I went to the square, and inquired in the second shop on the right for Prokhóritch. "Is there such a man?"--I asked.

“There is,”--I was told.

“And where does he live?”

“On the Oká, beyond the vegetable-gardens.”

“In whose house?”[42]

“His own.”

I wended my way to the Oká, searched out his house, that is to say, not actually a house, but a downright hovel. I beheld a man in a patched blue overcoat and a tattered cap,--of the petty burgher class, judging by his appearance,--standing with his back to me, and digging in his cabbage-garden.--I went up to him.

“Are you such and such a one?”--said I.

He turned round,--and to tell you the truth, such piercing eyes I have never seen in all my life. But his whole face was no bigger than one’s fist; his beard was wedge-shaped, and his lips were sunken: he was an aged man.

“I am he,”--he said.--“What do you wanta?”

“Why, here,”--said I;--“this is what I wanta,”--and I placed the document in his hand. He gazed at me very intently, and said:

“Please come into the house; I cannot read without my spectacles.”

Well, sir, he and I went into his kennel--actually, a regular kennel; poor, bare, crooked; it barely held together. On the wall was a holy picture of ancient work,[43] as black as a coal; only the whites of the eyes were fairly burning in the faces of the holy people. He took some round iron spectacles from a small table, placed them on his nose, perused the writing, and through his spectacles again scrutinised me.

“You have need of me?”

“I have,”--said I,--“that’s the fact.”

“Well,”--said he, “if you have, then make your statement, and I will listen.”

And just imagine; he sat down, and pulling a checked handkerchief from his pocket, he spread it out on his knees--and the handkerchief was full of holes--and gazed at me as solemnly as though he had been a

senator,[44] or some minister or other; and did not ask me to sit down. And what was still more astonishing, I suddenly felt myself growing timid, so timid ... simply, my soul sank into my heels. He pierced me through and through with his eyes, and that's all there is to be said! But I recovered my self-possession, and narrated to him my whole story. He remained silent for a while, shrank together, mowed with his lips, and then began to interrogate me, still as though he were a senator, so majestically and without haste. "What is your name?"--he asked. "How old are you? Who were your parents? Are you a bachelor or married?"--Then he began to mow with his lips again, frowned, thrust out his finger and said:

"Do reverence to the holy image of the honourable saints of Solovétzk,[45] Zósim and Saváty."

I made a reverence to the earth, and did not rise to my feet; such awe and submission did I feel for that man that I believe I would have instantly done anything whatsoever he might have ordered me!... I see that you are smiling, gentlemen; but I was in no mood for laughing then, by Heaven I was not.

"Rise, sir,"--he said at last.--"It is possible to help you. This has not been sent to you by way of punishment, but as a warning; it signifies that you are being looked after; some one is praying earnestly for you. Go now to the bazaar and buy yourself a bitch, which you must keep by you day and night, without ceasing. Your visions will cease, and your dog will prove necessary to you into the bargain."

A flash of light seemed suddenly to illuminate me; how those words did please me! I made obeisance to Prokhóritch, and was on the point of departing, but remembered that it was impossible for me not to show him my gratitude; I drew a three-ruble note from my pocket. But he put aside my hand and said to me:

"Give it to our chapel, or to the poor, for this service is gratis."

Again I made him an obeisance, nearly to the girdle, and immediately marched off to the bazaar. And fancy, no sooner had I begun to approach the shops when behold, a man in a frieze cloak advanced to meet me, and under his arm he carried a setter bitch, two months old, with light-brown hair, a white muzzle, and white fore paws.

"Halt!" said I to the man in the frieze cloak; "what will you take for her?"

"Two rubles in silver."

"Take three!"

The man was astonished, and thought the gentleman had lost his mind--but I threw a banknote in his teeth, seized the bitch in my arms, and rushed to my tarantás. The coachman harnessed up the horses briskly, and that same evening I was at home. The dog sat on my lap during the whole journey--and never uttered a sound; but I kept saying to her: "Tresórushko! Tresórushko!" I immediately gave her food and water, ordered straw to be brought, put her to bed, and dashed into bed myself. I blew out the light; darkness reigned.

"Come now, begin!"--said I.--Silence.--"Do begin, thou thus and so!"--Not a sound. It was laughable. I began to take courage.--"Come now, begin, thou thus and so, and 'tother thing!" But nothing happened--there was a complete lull! The only thing to be heard was the bitch breathing hard.

"Fílka!"--I shouted;--"Fílka! Come hither, stupid man!"--He entered.--"Dost thou hear the dog?"

"No, master,"--said he,--"I don't hear anything,"--and began to laugh.

"And thou wilt not hear it again forever! Here's half a ruble for thee for vodka!"

"Please let me kiss your hand,"--said the fool, and crawled to me in the dark.... My joy was great, I can tell you!

"And was that the end of it all?"--asked Antón Stepánitch, no longer ironically.

The visions did cease, it is true--and there were no disturbances of any sort--but wait, that was not the end of the whole matter. My Tresórushko began to grow, and turned out a cunning rogue. Thick-tailed, heavy, flop-eared, with drooping dewlaps, she was a regular "take-advance,"--a thoroughgoing good setter. And moreover, she became greatly attached to me. Hunting is bad in our parts,--well, but as I had set up a dog I had to supply myself with a gun also. I began to roam about the surrounding country with my Tresór; sometimes I would knock over a hare (my heavens, how she did course those hares!), and sometimes a quail or a duck. But the chief point was that Tresór never, never strayed a step away from me. Wherever I went, there she went also; I even took her to the bath with me--truly! One of our young gentlewomen undertook to eject me from her drawing-room on account of Tresór; but I raised such a row that I smashed some of her window-panes!

Well, sir, one day--it happened in summer.... And I must tell you that there was such a drought that no one could recall its like; the air was full of something which was neither smoke nor fog; there was an odour of

burning, and mist, and the sun was like a red-hot cannon-ball; and the dust was such that one could not leave off sneezing! People went about with their mouths gaping open, just like crows.

It bored me to sit at home constantly in complete undress, behind closed shutters; and by the way, the heat was beginning to moderate.... And so, gentlemen, I set off afoot to the house of one of my neighbours. This neighbour of mine lived about a verst from me,--and was really a benevolent lady. She was still young and blooming, and of the most attractive exterior; only she had a fickle disposition. But that is no detriment in the feminine sex; it even affords pleasure.... So, then, I trudged to her porch--and that trip seemed very salt to me! Well, I thought, Nimfodóra Semyónovna will regale me with bilberry-water, and other refreshments--and I had already grasped the door-handle when, suddenly, around the corner of the servants' cottage there arose a trampling of feet, a squealing and shouting of small boys.... I looked round. O Lord, my God! Straight toward me was dashing a huge, reddish beast, which at first sight I did not recognise as a dog; its jaws were gaping, its eyes were blood-shot, its hair stood on end.... Before I could take breath the monster leaped upon the porch, elevated itself on its hind legs, and fell straight on my breast. What do you think of that situation? I was swooning with fright, and could not lift my arms; I was completely stupefied; ... all I could see were the white tusks right at the end of my nose, the red tongue all swathed in foam. But at that moment another dark body soared through the air in front of me, like a ball--it was my darling Tresór coming to my rescue; and she went at that beast's throat like a leech! The beast rattled hoarsely in the throat, gnashed its teeth, staggered back.... With one jerk I tore open the door, and found myself in the anteroom. I stood there, beside myself with terror, threw my whole body against the lock, and listened to a desperate battle which was in progress on the porch. I began to shout, to call for help; every one in the house took alarm. Nimfodóra Semyónovna ran up with hair unbraided; voices clamoured in the courtyard--and suddenly there came a cry: "Hold him, hold him, lock the gate!"

I opened the door,--just a crack,--and looked. The monster was no longer on the porch. People were rushing in disorder about the courtyard, flourishing their arms, picking up billets of wood from the ground--just as though they had gone mad. "To the village! It has run to the village!" shrieked shrilly a peasant-woman in a pointed coronet head-dress of unusual dimensions, thrusting her head through a garret-window. I emerged from the house.

"Where is Tresór?"--said I.--And at that moment I caught sight of my saviour. She was walking away from the gate, limping, all bitten, and covered with blood....

“But what was it, after all?”--I asked the people, as they went circling round the courtyard like crazy folk.

“A mad dog!”--they answered me, “belonging to the Count; it has been roving about here since yesterday.”

We had a neighbour, a Count; he had introduced some very dreadful dogs from over-sea. My knees gave way beneath me; I hastened to the mirror and looked to see whether I had been bitten. No; God be thanked, nothing was visible; only, naturally, my face was all green; but Nimfodóra Semyónovna was lying on the couch, and clucking like a hen. And that was easily to be understood: in the first place, nerves; in the second place, sensibility. But she came to herself, and asked me in a very languid way: was I alive? I told her that I was, and that Tresór was my saviour.

“Akh,”--said she,--“what nobility! And I suppose the mad dog smothered her?”

“No,”--said I,--“it did not smother her, but it wounded her seriously.”

“Akh,”--said she,--“in that case, she must be shot this very moment!”

“Nothing of the sort,”--said I;--“I won’t agree to that; I shall try to cure her.” ...

In the meanwhile, Tresór began to scratch at the door; I started to open it for her.

“Akh,”--cried she,--“what are you doing? Why, she will bite us all dreadfully!”

“Pardon me,”--said I,--“the poison does not take effect so soon.”

“Akh,”--said she,--“how is that possible? Why, you have gone out of your mind!”

“Nimfótchka,”--said I,--“calm thyself; listen to reason....”

But all at once she began to scream: “Go away; go away this instant with your disgusting dog!”

“I will go,”--said I.

“Instantly,”--said she,--“this very second! Take thyself off, brigand,”--said she,--“and don’t dare ever to show yourself in my sight again. Thou mightest go mad thyself!”

“Very good, ma’am,”--said I; “only give me an equipage, for I am afraid to go home on foot now.”

She riveted her eyes on me. “Give, give him a calash, a carriage, a drozhky, whatever he wants,--anything, for the sake of getting rid of him as quickly as possible. Akh, what eyes! akh, what eyes he has!”--And with these words she flew out of the room, dealing a maid who was entering a box on the ear,--and I heard her go off into another fit of hysterics.--And you may believe me or not, gentlemen, but from that day forth I broke off all acquaintance with Nimfodóra Semyónovna; and, taking all things into mature consideration, I cannot but add that for that circumstance also I owe my friend Tresór a debt of gratitude until I lie down in my coffin.

Well, sir, I ordered a calash to be harnessed, placed Tresór in it, and drove off home with her. At home I looked her over, washed her wounds, and thought to myself: “I’ll take her to-morrow, as soon as it is light, to the wizard in Efrém County. Now this wizard was an old peasant, a wonderful man; he would whisper over water--but others say that he emitted serpents’ venom on it--and give it to you to drink, and your malady would instantly disappear. By the way, I thought, I’ll get myself bled in Efrémovo; ’tis a good remedy for terror; only, of course, not from the arm, but from the bleeding-vein.”

“But where is that place--the bleeding-vein?”--inquired Finopléntoff, with bashful curiosity.

Don’t you know? That spot on the fist close to the thumb, on which one shakes snuff from the horn.--Just here, see! ’Tis the very best place for blood-letting; therefore, judge for yourselves; from the arm it will be venal blood, while from this spot it is sparkling. The doctors don’t know that, and don’t understand it; how should they, the sluggards, the dumb idiots? Blacksmiths chiefly make use of it. And what skilful fellows they are! They’ll place their chisel on the spot, give it a whack with their hammer--and the deed is done!... Well, sir, while I was meditating in this wise, it had grown entirely dark out of doors, and it was time to go to sleep. I lay down on my bed, and Tresór, of course, was there also. But whether it was because of my fright or of the stifling heat, or because the fleas or my thoughts were bothersome, at any rate, I could not get to sleep. Such distress fell upon me as it is impossible to describe; and I kept drinking water, and opening the window, and thrumming the “Kamárynskaya”[46] on the guitar, with Italian variations.... In vain! I felt impelled to leave the room,--and that’s all there was to it. At last I made up my mind. I took a pillow, a coverlet, and a sheet, and wended my way across the garden to the hay-barn; well, and there I settled myself. And there things were agreeable to me, gentlemen; the night was still, extremely still, only now and then a breeze as soft as a woman’s hand would blow across my

cheek, and it was very cool; the hay was fragrant as tea, the katydids were rasping in the apple-trees; then suddenly a quail would emit its call--and you would feel that he was taking his ease, the scamp, sitting in the dew with his mate.... And the sky was so magnificent; the stars were twinkling, and sometimes a little cloud, as white as wadding, would float past, and even it would hardly stir....

At this point in the narrative, Skvorévitch sneezed; Kinarévitch, who never lagged behind his comrade in anything, sneezed also. Antón Stepánitch cast a glance of approbation at both.

Well, sir--[went on Porfíry Kapítonitch],--so I lay there, and still I could not get to sleep. A fit of meditation had seized upon me; and I pondered chiefly over the great marvel, how that Prokhóritch had rightly explained to me about the warning--and why such wonders should happen to me in particular.... I was astonished, in fact, because I could not understand it at all--while Tresórushko whimpered as she curled herself up on the hay; her wounds were paining her. And I'll tell you another thing that kept me from sleeping--you will hardly believe it; the moon! It stood right in front of me, so round and big and yellow and flat; and it seemed to me as though it were staring at me--by Heaven it did; and so arrogantly, importunately.... At last I stuck my tongue out at it, I really did. Come, I thought, what art thou so curious about? I turned away from it; but it crawled into my ear, it illuminated the back of my head, and flooded me as though with rain; I opened my eyes, and what did I see? It made every blade of grass, every wretched little blade in the hay, the most insignificant spider's web, stand out distinctly! "Well, look, then!" said I. There was no help for it. I propped my head on my hand and began to stare at it. But I could not keep it up; if you will believe it, my eyes began to stick out like a hare's and to open very wide indeed, just as though they did not know what sleep was like. I think I could have eaten up everything with those same eyes. The gate of the hay-barn stood wide open; I could see for a distance of five versts out on the plain; and distinctly, not in the usual way on a moonlight night. So I gazed and gazed, and did not even wink.... And suddenly it seemed to me as though something were waving about far, far away ... exactly as though things were glimmering indistinctly before my eyes. Some time elapsed; again a shadow leaped across my vision,--a little nearer now; then again, still nearer. What is it? I thought. Can it be a hare? No, I thought, it is larger than a hare, and its gait is unlike that of a hare. I continued to look, and again the shadow showed itself, and it was moving now across the pasture-land (and the pasture-land was whitish from the moonlight) like a very large spot; it was plain that it was some sort of a wild beast--a fox or a wolf. My heart contracted within me ... but what was I afraid of, after all? Aren't there plenty of wild animals running about the fields by night? But my curiosity was stronger than my fears; I rose up, opened my eyes very wide, and suddenly turned cold all over. I fairly froze rigid on

the spot, as though I had been buried in ice up to my ears; and why? The Lord only knows! And I saw the shadow growing bigger and bigger, which meant that it was making straight for the hay-barn.... And then it became apparent to me that it really was a large, big-headed wild beast.... It dashed onward like a whirlwind, like a bullet.... Good heavens! What was it? Suddenly it stopped short, as though it scented something.... Why, it was the mad dog I had encountered that day! 'Twas he, 'twas he! O Lord! And I could not stir a finger, I could not shout.... It ran to the gate, glared about with its eyes, emitted a howl, and dashed straight for me on the hay!

But out of the hay, like a lion, sprang my Tresór; and then the struggle began. The two clinched jaw to jaw, and rolled over the ground in a ball! What took place further I do not remember; all I do remember is that I flew head over heels across them, just as I was, into the garden, into the house, and into my own bedroom!... I almost dived under the bed--there's no use in concealing the fact. And what leaps, what bounds I made in the garden! You would have taken me for the leading ballerina who dances before the Emperor Napoleon on the day of his Angel--and even she couldn't have overtaken me. But when I had recovered myself a little, I immediately routed out the entire household; I ordered them all to arm themselves, and I myself took a sword and a revolver. (I must confess that I had purchased that revolver after the Emancipation, in case of need, you know--only I had hit upon such a beast of a pedlar that out of three charges two inevitably missed fire.) Well, sir, I took all this, and in this guise we sallied forth, in a regular horde, with staves and lanterns, and directed our footsteps toward the hay-barn. We reached it and called--nothing was to be heard; we entered the barn at last.... and what did we see? My poor Tresórushko lay dead, with her throat slit, and that accursed beast had vanished without leaving a trace!

Then, gentlemen, I began to bleat like a calf, and I will say it without shame; I fell down on the body of my twofold rescuer, so to speak, and kissed her head for a long time. And there I remained in that attitude until my old housekeeper, Praskóvya, brought me to my senses (she also had run out at the uproar).

"Why do you grieve so over the dog, Porfíry Stepánitch?"--said she. "You will surely catch cold, which God forbid!" (I was very lightly clad.) "And if that dog lost her life in saving you, she ought to reckon it as a great favour!"

Although I did not agree with Praskóvya, I went back to the house. And the mad dog was shot on the following day by a soldier from the garrison. And it must have been that that was the end appointed by Fate to the dog, for the soldier fired a gun for the first time in his life, although he had a medal for service in the year '12. So that is the

supernatural occurrence which happened to me.

THE narrator ceased speaking and began to fill his pipe. But we all exchanged glances of surprise.

“But perhaps you lead a very upright life,”--began Mr. Finopléntoff,--“and so by way of reward....” But at that word he faltered, for he saw that Porfíry Kapítonitch’s cheeks were beginning to swell out and turn red, and his eyes too were beginning to pucker up--evidently the man was on the point of breaking out....

“But admitting the possibility of the supernatural, the possibility of its interference in everyday life, so to speak,”--began Antón Stepánitch:--“then what rôle, after this, must sound sense play?”

None of us found any answer, and, as before, we remained perplexed.



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UNCLE VANYA
SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE
IN FOUR ACTS

By Anton Checkov

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CHARACTERS

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SONIA, his daughter by a former marriage

MME. VOITSKAYA, widow of a privy councilor, and mother of Serebrakoff's first wife

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MICHAEL ASTROFF, a doctor

ILIA (WAFFLES) TELEGIN, an impoverished landowner ========== ME

MARINA, an old nurse

A WORKMAN

SPECIAL NOTE - PRONUNCIATION for Uncle Vanya, Chekhov
Alexander: Al-ek-SAHN-der
Helena: He-LAY-nah
Serebrakoff: Se-re-BRAH-kof
Ivan: Ee-VAHN
Voitski: VOYT-skee
Astroff: AHS-trof
Ilia: EEL-ya
Telegin: Tel-YAY-gin ("g" sound, not "j")

The scene is laid on SEREBRAKOFF'S country place

UNCLE VANYA

ACT I

A country house on a terrace. In front of it a garden. In an avenue of trees, under an old poplar, stands a table set for tea, with a samovar, etc. Some benches and chairs stand near the table. On one of them is lying a guitar. A hammock is swung near the table. It is three o'clock in the afternoon of a cloudy day.

MARINA, a quiet, grey-haired, little old woman, is sitting at the table knitting a stocking.

ASTROFF is walking up and down near her.

MARINA. [Pouring some tea into a glass] Take a little tea, my son.

ASTROFF. [Takes the glass from her unwillingly] Somehow, I don't seem to want any.

MARINA. Then will you have a little vodka instead?

ASTROFF. No, I don't drink vodka every day, and besides, it is too hot now. [A pause] Tell me, nurse, how long have we known each other?

MARINA. [Thoughtfully] Let me see, how long is it? Lord—help me to remember. You first came here, into our parts—let me think—when was it? Sonia's mother was still alive—it was two winters before she died; that was eleven years ago—[thoughtfully] perhaps more.

ASTROFF. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes. You were handsome and young then, and now you are an old man and not handsome any more. You drink, too.

ASTROFF. Yes, ten years have made me another man. And why? Because I am overworked. Nurse, I am on my feet from dawn till dusk. I know no rest; at night I tremble under my blankets for fear of being dragged out to visit some one who is sick; I have toiled without repose or a day's freedom since I have known you; could I help growing old? And then, existence is tedious, anyway; it is a senseless, dirty business, this life, and goes heavily. Every one about here is silly, and after living with them for two or three years one grows silly oneself. It is inevitable. [Twisting his moustache] See what a long moustache I have grown. A foolish, long moustache. Yes, I am as silly as the rest, nurse, but not as stupid; no, I have not grown stupid. Thank God, my brain is not addled yet, though my feelings have grown numb. I ask nothing, I need nothing, I love no one, unless it is yourself alone. [He kisses her head] I had a nurse just like you when I was a child.

MARINA. Don't you want a bite of something to eat?

ASTROFF. No. During the third week of Lent I went to the epidemic at Malitskoi. It was eruptive typhoid. The peasants were all lying side by side in their huts, and the calves and pigs were running about the floor among the sick. Such dirt there was, and smoke! Unspeakable! I slaved among those people all day, not a crumb passed my lips, but when I got home there was still no rest for me; a switchman was carried in from the railroad; I laid him on the operating table and he went and died in my arms under chloroform, and then my feelings that should have been deadened awoke again, my conscience tortured me as if I had killed the man. I sat down and closed my eyes—like this—and thought: will our descendants two hundred years from now, for whom we are breaking the road, remember to give us a kind word? No, nurse, they will forget.

MARINA. Man is forgetful, but God remembers.

ASTROFF. Thank you for that. You have spoken the truth.

Enter VOITSKI from the house. He has been asleep after dinner and looks rather dishevelled. He sits down on the bench and straightens his collar.

VOITSKI. H'm. Yes. [A pause] Yes.

ASTROFF. Have you been asleep?

VOITSKI. Yes, very much so. [He yawns] Ever since the Professor and his wife have come, our daily life seems to have jumped the track. I sleep at the wrong time, drink wine, and eat all sorts of messes for luncheon and dinner. It isn't wholesome. Sonia and I used to work together and never had an idle moment, but now Sonia works alone and I only eat and drink and sleep. Something is wrong.

MARINA. [Shaking her head] Such a confusion in the house! The Professor gets up at twelve, the samovar is kept boiling all the morning, and everything has to wait for him. Before they came we used to have dinner at one o'clock, like everybody else, but now we have it at seven. The Professor sits up all night writing and reading, and suddenly, at two o'clock, there goes the bell! Heavens, what is that? The Professor wants some tea! Wake the servants, light the samovar! Lord, what disorder!

ASTROFF. Will they be here long?

VOITSKI. A hundred years! The Professor has decided to make his home here.

MARINA. Look at this now! The samovar has been on the table for two hours, and they are all out walking!

VOITSKI. All right, don't get excited; here they come.

Voices are heard approaching. SEREBRAKOFF, HELENA, SONIA, and TELEGIN come in from the depths of the garden, returning from their walk.

SEREBRAKOFF. Superb! Superb! What beautiful views!

TELEGIN. They are wonderful, your Excellency.

SONIA. To-morrow we shall go into the woods, shall we, papa?

VOITSKI. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is ready.

SEREBRAKOFF. Won't you please be good enough to send my tea into the library? I still have some work to finish.

SONIA. I am sure you will love the woods.

HELENA, SEREBRAKOFF, and SONIA go into the house. TELEGIN sits down at the table beside MARINA.

VOITSKI. There goes our learned scholar on a hot, sultry day like this, in his overcoat and goloshes and carrying an umbrella!

ASTROFF. He is trying to take good care of his health.

VOITSKI. How lovely she is! How lovely! I have never in my life seen a more beautiful woman.

TELEGIN. Do you know, Marina, that as I walk in the fields or in the shady garden, as I look at this table here, my heart swells with unbounded happiness. The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and contentment—what more could the soul desire? [Takes a glass of tea.]

VOITSKI. [Dreaming] Such eyes—a glorious woman!

ASTROFF. Come, Ivan, tell us something.

VOITSKI. [Indolently] What shall I tell you?

ASTROFF. Haven't you any news for us?

VOITSKI. No, it is all stale. I am just the same as usual, or perhaps worse, because I have become lazy. I don't do anything now but croak like an old raven. My mother, the old magpie, is still chattering about the emancipation of woman, with one eye on her grave and the other on her learned books, in which she is always looking for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROFF. And the Professor?

VOITSKI. The Professor sits in his library from morning till night, as usual—

"Straining the mind, wrinkling the brow,
We write, write, write,
Without respite
Or hope of praise in the future or now."

Poor paper! He ought to write his autobiography; he would make a really splendid subject for a book! Imagine it, the life of a retired professor, as stale as a piece of hardtack, tortured by gout, headaches, and rheumatism, his liver bursting with jealousy and envy, living on the estate of his first wife, although he hates it, because he can't afford to live in town. He is everlastingly whining about his hard lot, though, as a matter of fact, he is extraordinarily lucky. He is the son of a common deacon and has attained the professor's chair, become the son-in-law of a senator, is called "your Excellency," and so on. But I'll tell you something; the man has been writing on art for twenty-five years, and he doesn't know the very first thing about it. For twenty-five years he has been chewing on other men's thoughts about realism, naturalism, and all such foolishness; for twenty-five years he has been reading and writing things that clever men have long known and stupid ones are not interested in; for twenty-five years he has been making his imaginary mountains out of molehills. And just think of the man's self-conceit and presumption all this time! For twenty-five years he has been masquerading in false clothes and has now retired absolutely unknown to any living soul; and yet see him! stalking across the earth like a demi-god!

ASTROFF. I believe you envy him.

VOITSKI. Yes, I do. Look at the success he has had with women! Don Juan himself was not more favoured. His first wife, who was my sister, was a beautiful, gentle being, as pure as the blue heaven

there above us, noble, great-hearted, with more admirers than he has pupils, and she loved him as only beings of angelic purity can love those who are as pure and beautiful as themselves. His mother-in-law, my mother, adores him to this day, and he still inspires a sort of worshipful awe in her. His second wife is, as you see, a brilliant beauty; she married him in his old age and has surrendered all the glory of her beauty and freedom to him. Why? What for?

ASTROFF. Is she faithful to him?

VOITSKI. Yes, unfortunately she is.

ASTROFF. Why unfortunately?

VOITSKI. Because such fidelity is false and unnatural, root and branch. It sounds well, but there is no logic in it. It is thought immoral for a woman to deceive an old husband whom she hates, but quite moral for her to strangle her poor youth in her breast and banish every vital desire from her heart.

TELEGIN. [In a tearful voice] Vanya, I don't like to hear you talk so. Listen, Vanya; every one who betrays husband or wife is faithless, and could also betray his country.

VOITSKI. [Crossly] Turn off the tap, Waffles.

TELEGIN. No, allow me, Vanya. My wife ran away with a lover on the day after our wedding, because my exterior was unprepossessing. I have never failed in my duty since then. I love her and am true to her to this day. I help her all I can and have given my fortune to educate the daughter of herself and her lover. I have forfeited my happiness, but I have kept my pride. And she? Her youth has fled, her beauty has faded according to the laws of nature, and her lover is dead. What has she kept?

HELENA and SONIA come in; after them comes MME. VOITSKAYA carrying a book. She sits down and begins to read. Some one hands her a glass of tea which she drinks without looking up.

SONIA. [Hurriedly, to the nurse] There are some peasants waiting out there. Go and see what they want. I shall pour the tea. [Pours out some glasses of tea.]

MARINA goes out. HELENA takes a glass and sits drinking in the hammock.

ASTROFF. I have come to see your husband. You wrote me that he had rheumatism and I know not what else, and that he was very ill, but he appears to be as lively as a cricket.

HELENA. He had a fit of the blues yesterday evening and complained of pains in his legs, but he seems all right again to-day.

ASTROFF. And I galloped over here twenty miles at break-neck speed! No matter, though, it is not the first time. Once here, however, I am going to stay until to-morrow, and at any rate sleep quantum satis.

SONIA. Oh, splendid! You so seldom spend the night with us. Have you had dinner yet?

ASTROFF. No.

SONIA. Good. So you will have it with us. We dine at seven now. [Drinks her tea] This tea is cold!

TELEGIN. Yes, the samovar has grown cold.

HELENA. Don't mind, Monsieur Ivan, we will drink cold tea, then.

TELEGIN. I beg your pardon, my name is not Ivan, but Ilia, ma'am—Ilia Telegin, or Waffles, as I am sometimes called on account of my pock-marked face. I am Sonia's godfather, and his Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I now live with you, ma'am, on this estate, and perhaps you will be so good as to notice that I dine with you every day.

SONIA. He is our great help, our right-hand man. [Tenderly] Dear godfather, let me pour you some tea.

MME. VOITSKAYA. Oh! Oh!

SONIA. What is it, grandmother?

MME. VOITSKAYA. I forgot to tell Alexander—I have lost my memory—I received a letter to-day from Paul Alexevitch in Kharkoff. He has sent me a new pamphlet.

ASTROFF. Is it interesting?

MME. VOITSKAYA. Yes, but strange. He refutes the very theories which he defended seven years ago. It is appalling!

VOITSKI. There is nothing appalling about it. Drink your tea, mamma.

MME. VOITSKAYA. It seems you never want to listen to what I have to say. Pardon me, Jean, but you have changed so in the last year that I hardly know you. You used to be a man of settled convictions and had an illuminating personality——

VOITSKI. Oh, yes. I had an illuminating personality, which illuminated no one. [A pause] I had an illuminating personality! You couldn't say anything more biting. I am forty-seven years old. Until last year I endeavoured, as you do now, to blind my eyes by your pedantry to the truths of life. But now—Oh, if you only knew! If you knew how I lie awake at night, heartsick and angry, to think how stupidly I have wasted my time when I might have been winning from life everything which my old age now forbids.

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, how dreary!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [To her son] You speak as if your former convictions were somehow to blame, but you yourself, not they, were at fault. You have forgotten that a conviction, in itself, is nothing but a dead letter. You should have done something.

VOITSKI. Done something! Not every man is capable of being a writer perpetuum mobile like your Herr Professor.

MME. VOITSKAYA. What do you mean by that?

SONIA. [Imploringly] Mother! Uncle Vanya! I entreat you!

VOITSKI. I am silent. I apologise and am silent. [A pause.]

HELENA. What a fine day! Not too hot. [A pause.]

VOITSKI. A fine day to hang oneself.

TELEGIN tunes the guitar. MARINA appears near the house, calling the chickens.

MARINA. Chick, chick, chick!

SONIA. What did the peasants want, nurse?

MARINA. The same old thing, the same old nonsense. Chick, chick, chick!

SONIA. Why are you calling the chickens?

MARINA. The speckled hen has disappeared with her chicks. I am afraid the crows have got her.

TELEGIN plays a polka. All listen in silence. Enter WORKMAN.

WORKMAN. Is the doctor here? [To ASTROFF] Excuse me, sir, but I have been sent to fetch you.

ASTROFF. Where are you from?

WORKMAN. The factory.

ASTROFF. [Annoyed] Thank you. There is nothing for it, then, but to go. [Looking around him for his cap] Damn it, this is annoying!

SONIA. Yes, it is too bad, really. You must come back to dinner from the factory.

ASTROFF. No, I won't be able to do that. It will be too late. Now where, where—[To the WORKMAN] Look here, my man, get me a glass of vodka, will you? [The WORKMAN goes out] Where—where—[Finds his cap] One of the characters in Ostroff's plays is a man with a long moustache and short wits, like me. However, let me bid you good-bye, ladies and gentlemen. [To HELENA] I should be really delighted if you would come to see me some day with Miss Sonia. My estate is small, but if you are interested in such things I should like to show you a nursery and seed-bed whose like you will not find within a thousand miles of here. My place is surrounded by government forests. The forester is old and always ailing, so I superintend almost all the work myself.

HELENA. I have always heard that you were very fond of the woods. Of course one can do a great deal of good by helping to preserve them, but does not that work interfere with your real calling?

ASTROFF. God alone knows what a man's real calling is.

HELENA. And do you find it interesting?

ASTROFF. Yes, very.

VOITSKI. [Sarcastically] Oh, extremely!

HELENA. You are still young, not over thirty-six or seven, I should say, and I suspect that the woods do not interest you as much as you say they do. I should think you would find them monotonous.

SONIA. No, the work is thrilling. Dr. Astroff watches over the old woods and sets out new plantations every year, and he has already received a diploma and a bronze medal. If you will listen to what he can tell you, you will agree with him entirely. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, that they teach mankind to understand beauty and attune his mind to lofty sentiments. Forests temper a stern climate, and in countries where the climate is milder, less strength is wasted in the battle with nature, and the people are kind and gentle. The inhabitants of such countries are handsome, tractable, sensitive, graceful in speech and gesture. Their philosophy is joyous, art and science blossom among them, their treatment of women is full of exquisite nobility——

VOITSKI. [Laughing] Bravo! Bravo! All that is very pretty, but it is also unconvincing. So, my friend [To ASTROFF] you must let me go on burning firewood in my stoves and building my sheds of planks.

ASTROFF. You can burn peat in your stoves and build your sheds of stone. Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood from necessity, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the axe. Millions of trees have perished. The homes of the wild animals and birds have been desolated; the rivers are shrinking, and many beautiful landscapes are gone forever. And why? Because men are too lazy and stupid to stoop down and pick up their fuel from the ground. [To HELENA] Am I not right, Madame? Who but a stupid barbarian could burn so much beauty in his stove and destroy that which he cannot make? Man is endowed with reason and the power to create, so that he may increase that which has been given him, but until now he has not created, but demolished. The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running dry, the game is exterminated, the climate is spoiled, and the earth becomes poorer and uglier every day. [To VOITSKI] I read irony in your eye; you do not take what I am saying seriously, and—and—after all, it may very well be nonsense. But when I pass peasant-forests that I have preserved from the axe, or hear the rustling of the young plantations set out with my own hands, I feel as if I had had some small share in improving the climate, and that if mankind is happy a thousand years from now I will have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. When I plant a little birch tree and then see it budding into young green and swaying in the wind, my heart swells with pride and I—[Sees the WORKMAN, who is bringing him a glass of vodka on a tray] however—[He drinks] I must be off. Probably it is all nonsense, anyway. Good-bye.

He goes toward the house. SONIA takes his arm and goes with him.

SONIA. When are you coming to see us again?

ASTROFF. I can't say.

SONIA. In a month?

ASTROFF and SONIA go into the house. HELENA and VOITSKI walk over to the terrace.

HELENA. You have behaved shockingly again. Ivan, what sense was there in teasing your mother and talking about perpetuum mobile? And at breakfast you quarreled with Alexander again. Really, your behaviour is too petty.

VOITSKI. But if I hate him?

HELENA. You hate Alexander without reason; he is like every one else, and no worse than you are.

VOITSKI. If you could only see your face, your gestures! Oh, how tedious your life must be.

HELENA. It is tedious, yes, and dreary! You all abuse my husband and look on me with compassion; you think, "Poor woman, she is married to an old man." How well I understand your compassion! As Astroff said just now, see how you thoughtlessly destroy the forests, so that there will soon be none left. So you also destroy mankind, and soon fidelity and purity and self-sacrifice will have vanished with the woods. Why cannot you look calmly at a woman unless she is yours? Because, the doctor was right, you are all possessed by a devil of destruction; you have no mercy on the woods or the birds or on women or on one another.

VOITSKI. I don't like your philosophy.

HELENA. That doctor has a sensitive, weary face—an interesting face. Sonia evidently likes him, and she is in love with him, and I can understand it. This is the third time he has been here since I have come, and I have not had a real talk with him yet or made much of him. He thinks I am disagreeable. Do you know, Ivan, the reason you and I are such friends? I think it is because we are both lonely and unfortunate. Yes, unfortunate. Don't look at me in that way, I don't like it.

VOITSKI. How can I look at you otherwise when I love you? You are my joy, my life, and my youth. I know that my chances of being loved in return are infinitely small, do not exist, but I ask nothing of you. Only let me look at you, listen to your voice—

HELENA. Hush, some one will overhear you.

[They go toward the house.]

VOITSKI. [Following her] Let me speak to you of my love, do not drive me away, and this alone will be my greatest happiness!

HELENA. Ah! This is agony!

TELEGIN strikes the strings of his guitar and plays a polka. MME. VOITSKAYA writes something on the leaves of her pamphlet.

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The dining-room of SEREBRAKOFF'S house. It is night. The tapping of the WATCHMAN'S rattle is heard in the garden. SEREBRAKOFF is dozing in an arm-chair by an open window and HELENA is sitting beside him, also half asleep.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Rousing himself] Who is here? Is it you, Sonia?

HELENA. It is I.

SEREBRAKOFF. Oh, it is you, Nelly. This pain is intolerable.

HELENA. Your shawl has slipped down. [She wraps up his legs in the shawl] Let me shut the window.

SEREBRAKOFF. No, leave it open; I am suffocating. I dreamt just now that my left leg belonged to some one else, and it hurt so that I woke. I don't believe this is gout, it is more like rheumatism. What time is it?

HELENA. Half past twelve. [A pause.]

SEREBRAKOFF. I want you to look for Batushka's works in the library to-morrow. I think we have him.

HELENA. What is that?

SEREBRAKOFF. Look for Batushka to-morrow morning; we used to have him, I remember. Why do I find it so hard to breathe?

HELENA. You are tired; this is the second night you have had no sleep.

SEREBRAKOFF. They say that Turgenieff got angina of the heart from gout. I am afraid I am getting angina too. Oh, damn this horrible, accursed old age! Ever since I have been old I have been hateful to myself, and I am sure, hateful to you all as well.

HELENA. You speak as if we were to blame for your being old.

SEREBRAKOFF. I am more hateful to you than to any one.

HELENA gets up and walks away from him, sitting down at a distance.

SEREBRAKOFF. You are quite right, of course. I am not an idiot; I can understand you. You are young and healthy and beautiful, and longing for life, and I am an old dotard, almost a dead man already. Don't I know it? Of course I see that it is foolish for me to live so long, but wait! I shall soon set you all free. My life cannot drag on much longer.

HELENA. You are overtaxing my powers of endurance. Be quiet, for God's sake!

SEREBRAKOFF. It appears that, thanks to me, everybody's power of endurance is being overtaxed; everybody is miserable, only I am blissfully triumphant. Oh, yes, of course!

HELENA. Be quiet! You are torturing me.

SEREBRAKOFF. I torture everybody. Of course.

HELENA. [Weeping] This is unbearable! Tell me, what is it you want me to do?

SEREBRAKOFF. Nothing.

HELENA. Then be quiet, please.

SEREBRAKOFF. It is funny that everybody listens to Ivan and his old idiot of a mother, but the moment I open my lips you all begin to feel ill-treated. You can't even stand the sound of my voice. Even if I am hateful, even if I am a selfish tyrant, haven't I the right to be one at my age? Haven't I deserved it? Haven't I, I ask you, the right to be respected, now that I am old?

HELENA. No one is disputing your rights. [The window slams in the wind] The wind is rising, I must shut the window. [She shuts it] We shall have rain in a moment. Your rights have never been questioned by anybody.

The WATCHMAN in the garden sounds his rattle.

SEREBRAKOFF. I have spent my life working in the interests of learning. I am used to my library and the lecture hall and to the esteem and admiration of my colleagues. Now I suddenly find myself plunged in this wilderness, condemned to see the same stupid people from morning till night and listen to their futile conversation. I want to live; I long for success and fame and the stir of the world, and here I am in exile! Oh, it is dreadful to spend every moment grieving for the lost past, to see the success of others and sit here with nothing to do but to fear death. I cannot stand it! It is more than I can bear. And you will not even forgive me for being old!

HELENA. Wait, have patience; I shall be old myself in four or five years.

SONIA comes in.

SONIA. Father, you sent for Dr. Astroff, and now when he comes you refuse to see him. It is not nice to give a man so much trouble for nothing.

SEREBRAKOFF. What do I care about your Astroff? He understands medicine about as well as I understand astronomy.

SONIA. We can't send for the whole medical faculty, can we, to treat your gout?

SEREBRAKOFF. I won't talk to that madman!

SONIA. Do as you please. It's all the same to me. [She sits down.]

SEREBRAKOFF. What time is it?

HELENA. One o'clock.

SEREBRAKOFF. It is stifling in here. Sonia, hand me that bottle on the table.

SONIA. Here it is. [She hands him a bottle of medicine.]

SEREBRAKOFF. [Crossly] No, not that one! Can't you understand me? Can't I ask you to do a thing?

SONIA. Please don't be captious with me. Some people may like it, but you must spare me, if you please, because I don't. Besides, I haven't the time; we are cutting the hay to-morrow and I must get up early.

VOITSKI comes in dressed in a long gown and carrying a candle.

VOITSKI. A thunderstorm is coming up. [The lightning flashes] There it is! Go to bed, Helena and Sonia. I have come to take your place.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Frightened] No, n-o, no! Don't leave me alone with him! Oh, don't. He will begin to lecture me.

VOITSKI. But you must give them a little rest. They have not slept for two nights.

SEREBRAKOFF. Then let them go to bed, but you go away too! Thank you. I implore you to go. For the sake of our former friendship do not protest against going. We will talk some other time——

VOITSKI. Our former friendship! Our former——

SONIA. Hush, Uncle Vanya!

SEREBRAKOFF. [To his wife] My darling, don't leave me alone with him. He will begin to lecture me.

VOITSKI. This is ridiculous.

MARINA comes in carrying a candle.

SONIA. You must go to bed, nurse, it is late.

MARINA. I haven't cleared away the tea things. Can't go to bed yet.

SEREBRAKOFF. No one can go to bed. They are all worn out, only I enjoy perfect happiness.

MARINA. [Goes up to SEREBRAKOFF and speaks tenderly] What's the matter, master? Does it hurt? My own legs are aching too, oh, so badly. [Arranges his shawl about his legs] You have had this illness such a long time. Sonia's dead mother used to stay awake with you too, and wear herself out for you. She loved you dearly. [A pause] Old people want to be pitied as much as young ones, but nobody cares about them somehow. [She kisses SEREBRAKOFF'S shoulder] Come, master, let me give you some linden-tea and warm your poor feet for you. I shall pray to God for you.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Touched] Let us go, Marina.

MARINA. My own feet are aching so badly, oh, so badly! [She and SONIA lead SEREBRAKOFF out] Sonia's mother used to wear herself out with sorrow and weeping. You were still little and foolish then, Sonia. Come, come, master.

SEREBRAKOFF, SONIA and MARINA go out.

HELENA. I am absolutely exhausted by him, and can hardly stand.

VOITSKI. You are exhausted by him, and I am exhausted by my own self. I have not slept for three nights.

HELENA. Something is wrong in this house. Your mother hates everything but her pamphlets and the professor; the professor is vexed, he won't trust me, and fears you; Sonia is angry with her father, and with me, and hasn't spoken to me for two weeks; I am at the end of my strength, and have come near bursting into tears at least twenty times to-day. Something is wrong in this house.

VOITSKI. Leave speculating alone.

HELENA. You are cultured and intelligent, Ivan, and you surely understand that the world is not destroyed by villains and conflagrations, but by hate and malice and all this spiteful tattling. It is your duty to make peace, and not to growl at everything.

VOITSKI. Help me first to make peace with myself. My darling! [Seizes her hand.]

HELENA. Let go! [She drags her hand away] Go away!

VOITSKI. Soon the rain will be over, and all nature will sigh and awake refreshed. Only I am not refreshed by the storm. Day and night the thought haunts me like a fiend, that my life is lost for ever. My past does not count, because I frittered it away on trifles, and the present has so terribly miscarried! What shall I do with my life and my love? What is to become of them? This wonderful feeling of mine will be wasted and lost as a ray of sunlight is lost that falls into a dark chasm, and my life will go with it.

HELENA. I am as it were benumbed when you speak to me of your love, and I don't know how to answer you. Forgive me, I have nothing to say to you. [She tries to go out] Good-night!

VOITSKI. [Barring the way] If you only knew how I am tortured by the thought that beside me in this house is another life that is being lost forever—it is yours! What are you waiting for? What accursed philosophy stands in your way? Oh, understand, understand——

HELENA. [Looking at him intently] Ivan, you are drunk!

VOITSKI. Perhaps. Perhaps.

HELENA. Where is the doctor?

VOITSKI. In there, spending the night with me. Perhaps I am drunk, perhaps I am; nothing is impossible.

HELENA. Have you just been drinking together? Why do you do that?

VOITSKI. Because in that way I get a taste of life. Let me do it, Helena!

HELENA. You never used to drink, and you never used to talk so much. Go to bed, I am tired of you.

VOITSKI. [Falling on his knees before her] My sweetheart, my beautiful one——

HELENA. [Angrily] Leave me alone! Really, this has become too disagreeable.

HELENA goes out. A pause.

VOITSKI [Alone] She is gone! I met her first ten years ago, at her sister's house, when she was seventeen and I was thirty-seven. Why did I not fall in love with her then and propose to her? It would have been so easy! And now she would have been my wife. Yes, we would both have been waked to-night by the thunderstorm, and she would have been frightened, but I would have held her in my arms and whispered: "Don't be afraid! I am here." Oh, enchanting dream, so sweet that I laugh to think of it. [He laughs] But my God! My head reels! Why am I so old? Why won't she understand me? I hate all that rhetoric of hers, that morality of indolence, that absurd talk about the destruction of the world——[A pause] Oh, how I have been deceived! For years I have worshipped that miserable gout-ridden professor. Sonia and I have squeezed this estate dry for his sake. We have bartered our butter and curds and peas like misers, and have never kept a morsel for ourselves, so that we could scrape enough pennies together to send to him. I was proud of him and of his learning; I received all his words and writings as inspired, and now? Now he has retired, and what is the total of his life? A blank! He is absolutely unknown, and his fame has burst like a soap-bubble. I have been deceived; I see that now, basely deceived.

ASTROFF comes in. He has his coat on, but is without his waistcoat or collar, and is slightly drunk. TELEGIN follows him, carrying a guitar.

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN. But every one is asleep.

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN begins to play softly.

ASTROFF. Are you alone here? No women about? [Sings with his arms akimbo.]

"The hut is cold, the fire is dead;
Where shall the master lay his head?"

The thunderstorm woke me. It was a heavy shower. What time is it?

VOITSKI. The devil only knows.

ASTROFF. I thought I heard Helena's voice.

VOITSKI. She was here a moment ago.

ASTROFF. What a beautiful woman! [Looking at the medicine bottles on the table] Medicine, is it? What a variety we have; prescriptions from Moscow, from Kharkoff, from Tula! Why, he has been pestering all the towns of Russia with his gout! Is he ill, or simply shamming?

VOITSKI. He is really ill.

ASTROFF. What is the matter with you to-night? You seem sad. Is it because you are sorry for the professor?

VOITSKI. Leave me alone.

ASTROFF. Or in love with the professor's wife?

VOITSKI. She is my friend.

ASTROFF. Already?

VOITSKI. What do you mean by "already"?

ASTROFF. A woman can only become a man's friend after having first been his acquaintance and then his beloved—then she becomes his friend.

VOITSKI. What vulgar philosophy!

ASTROFF. What do you mean? Yes, I must confess I am getting vulgar, but then, you see, I am drunk. I usually only drink like this once a month. At such times my audacity and temerity know no bounds. I feel capable of anything. I attempt the most difficult operations and do them magnificently. The most brilliant plans for the future take shape in my head. I am no longer a poor fool of a doctor, but mankind's greatest benefactor. I evolve my own system of philosophy and all of you seem to crawl at my feet like so many insects or microbes. [To TELEGIN] Play, Waffles!

TELEGIN. My dear boy, I would with all my heart, but do listen to reason; everybody in the house is asleep.

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN plays softly.

ASTROFF. I want a drink. Come, we still have some brandy left. And then, as soon as it is day, you will come home with me. [He sees SONIA, who comes in at that moment.]

ASTROFF. I beg your pardon, I have no collar on.

[He goes out quickly, followed by TELEGIN.]

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, you and the doctor have been drinking! The good fellows have been getting together! It is all very well for him, he has always done it, but why do you follow his example? It looks dreadfully at your age.

VOITSKI. Age has nothing to do with it. When real life is wanting one must create an illusion. It is better than nothing.

SONIA. Our hay is all cut and rotting in these daily rains, and here you are busy creating illusions! You have given up the farm altogether. I have done all the work alone until I am at the end of my strength—[Frightened] Uncle! Your eyes are full of tears!

VOITSKI. Tears? Nonsense, there are no tears in my eyes. You looked at me then just as your dead mother used to, my darling—[He eagerly kisses her face and hands] My sister, my dearest sister, where are you now? Ah, if you only knew, if you only knew!

SONIA. If she only knew what, Uncle?

VOITSKI. My heart is bursting. It is awful. No matter, though. I must go. [He goes out.]

SONIA. [Knocks at the door] Dr. Astroff! Are you awake? Please come here for a minute.

ASTROFF. [Behind the door] In a moment.

He appears in a few seconds. He has put on his collar and waistcoat.

ASTROFF. What do you want?

SONIA. Drink as much as you please yourself if you don't find it revolting, but I implore you not to let my uncle do it. It is bad for him.

ASTROFF. Very well; we won't drink any more. I am going home at once. That is settled. It will be dawn by the time the horses are harnessed.

SONIA. It is still raining; wait till morning.

ASTROFF. The storm is blowing over. This is only the edge of it. I must go. And please don't ask me to come and see your father any more. I tell him he has gout, and he says it is rheumatism. I tell him to lie down, and he sits up. To-day he refused to see me at all.

SONIA. He has been spoilt. [She looks in the sideboard] Won't you have a bite to eat?

ASTROFF. Yes, please. I believe I will.

SONIA. I love to eat at night. I am sure we shall find something in here. They say that he has made a great many conquests in his life, and that the women have spoiled him. Here is some cheese for you.

[They stand eating by the sideboard.]

ASTROFF. I haven't eaten anything to-day. Your father has a very difficult nature. [He takes a bottle out of the sideboard] May I? [He pours himself a glass of vodka] We are alone here, and I can speak frankly. Do you know, I could not stand living in this house for even a month? This atmosphere would stifle me. There is your father, entirely absorbed in his books, and his gout; there is your Uncle Vanya with his hypochondria, your grandmother, and finally, your step-mother—

SONIA. What about her?

ASTROFF. A human being should be entirely beautiful: the face, the clothes, the mind, the thoughts. Your step-mother is, of course, beautiful to look at, but don't you see? She does nothing but sleep and eat and walk and bewitch us, and that is all. She has no responsibilities, everything is done for her—am I not right? And an idle life can never be a pure one. [A pause] However, I may be judging her too severely. Like your Uncle Vanya, I am discontented, and so we are both grumblers.

SONIA. Aren't you satisfied with life?

ASTROFF. I like life as life, but I hate and despise it in a little Russian country village, and as far as my own personal life goes, by heaven! there is absolutely no redeeming feature about it. Haven't you noticed if you are riding through a dark wood at night and see a little light shining ahead, how you forget your fatigue and the darkness and the sharp twigs that whip your face? I work, that you know—as no one else in the country works. Fate beats me on without rest; at times I suffer unendurably and I see no light ahead. I have no hope; I do not like people. It is long since I have loved any one.

SONIA. You love no one?

ASTROFF. Not a soul. I only feel a sort of tenderness for your old nurse for old-times' sake. The peasants are all alike; they are stupid and live in dirt, and the educated people are hard to get along with. One gets tired of them. All our good friends are petty and shallow and see no farther than their own noses; in one word, they are dull. Those that have brains are hysterical, devoured with a mania for self-analysis. They whine, they hate, they pick faults everywhere with unhealthy sharpness. They sneak up to me sideways, look at me out of a corner of the eye, and say: "That man is a lunatic," "That man is a wind-bag." Or, if they don't know what else to label me with, they say I am strange. I like the woods; that is strange. I don't eat meat; that is strange, too. Simple, natural relations between man and man or man and nature do not exist. [He tries to go out; SONIA prevents him.]

SONIA. I beg you, I implore you, not to drink any more!

ASTROFF. Why not?

SONIA. It is so unworthy of you. You are well-bred, your voice is sweet, you are even—more than any one I know—handsome. Why do you want to resemble the common people that drink and play cards? Oh, don't, I beg you! You always say that people do not create anything, but only destroy what heaven has given them. Why, oh, why, do you destroy yourself? Oh, don't, I implore you not to! I entreat you!

ASTROFF. [Gives her his hand] I won't drink any more.

SONIA. Promise me.

ASTROFF. I give you my word of honour.

SONIA. [Squeezing his hand] Thank you.

ASTROFF. I have done with it. You see, I am perfectly sober again, and so I shall stay till the end of my life. [He looks his watch] But, as I was saying, life holds nothing for me; my race is run. I am old, I am tired, I am trivial; my sensibilities are dead. I could never attach myself to any one again. I love no one, and never shall! Beauty alone has the power to touch me still. I am deeply moved by it. Helena could turn my head in a day if she wanted to, but that is not love, that is not affection—

[He shudders and covers his face with his hands.]

SONIA. What is it?

ASTROFF. Nothing. During Lent one of my patients died under chloroform.

SONIA. It is time to forget that. [A pause] Tell me, doctor, if I had a friend or a younger sister, and if you knew that she, well—loved you, what would you do?

ASTROFF. [Shrugging his shoulders] I don't know. I don't think I should do anything. I should make her understand that I could not return her love—however, my mind is not bothered about those things now. I must start at once if I am ever to get off. Good-bye, my dear girl. At this rate we shall stand here talking till morning. [He shakes hands with her] I shall go out through the sitting-room, because I am afraid your uncle might detain me. [He goes out.]

SONIA. [Alone] Not a word! His heart and soul are still locked from me, and yet for some reason I am strangely happy. I wonder why? [She laughs with pleasure] I told him that he was well-bred and handsome and that his voice was sweet. Was that a mistake? I can still feel his voice vibrating in the air; it caresses me. [Wringing her hands] Oh! how terrible it is to be plain! I am plain, I know it. As I came out of church last Sunday I overheard a woman say, "She is a dear, noble girl, but what a pity she is so ugly!" So ugly!

HELENA comes in and throws open the window.

HELENA. The storm is over. What delicious air! [A pause] Where is the doctor?

SONIA. He has gone. [A pause.]

HELENA. Sonia!

SONIA. Yes?

HELENA. How much longer are you going to sulk at me? We have not hurt each other. Why not be friends? We have had enough of this.

SONIA. I myself—[She embraces HELENA] Let us make peace.

HELENA. With all my heart. [They are both moved.]

SONIA. Has papa gone to bed?

HELENA. No, he is sitting up in the drawing-room. Heaven knows what reason you and I had for not speaking to each other for weeks. [Sees the open sideboard] Who left the sideboard open?

SONIA. Dr. Astroff has just had supper.

HELENA. There is some wine. Let us seal our friendship.

SONIA. Yes, let us.

HELENA. Out of one glass. [She fills a wine-glass] So, we are friends, are we?

SONIA. Yes. [They drink and kiss each other] I have long wanted to make friends, but somehow, I was ashamed to. [She weeps.]

HELENA. Why are you crying?

SONIA. I don't know. It is nothing.

HELENA. There, there, don't cry. [She weeps] Silly! Now I am crying too. [A pause] You are angry with me because I seem to have married your father for his money, but don't believe the gossip you hear. I swear to you I married him for love. I was fascinated by his fame and learning. I know now that it was not real love, but it seemed real at the time. I am innocent, and yet your clever, suspicious eyes have been punishing me for an imaginary crime ever since my marriage.

SONIA. Peace, peace! Let us forget the past.

HELENA. You must not look so at people. It is not becoming to you. You must trust people, or life becomes impossible.

SONIA. Tell me truly, as a friend, are you happy?

HELENA. Truly, no.

SONIA. I knew it. One more question: do you wish your husband were young?

HELENA. What a child you are! Of course I do. Go on, ask something else.

SONIA. Do you like the doctor?

HELENA. Yes, very much indeed.

SONIA. [Laughing] I have a stupid face, haven't I? He has just gone out, and his voice is still in my ears; I hear his step; I see his face in the dark window. Let me say all I have in my heart! But no, I cannot speak of it so loudly. I am ashamed. Come to my room and let me tell you there. I seem foolish to you, don't I? Talk to me of him.

HELENA. What can I say?

SONIA. He is clever. He can do everything. He can cure the sick, and plant woods.

HELENA. It is not a question of medicine and woods, my dear, he is a man of genius. Do you know what that means? It means he is brave, profound, and of clear insight. He plants a tree and his mind travels a thousand years into the future, and he sees visions of the happiness of the human race. People like him are rare and should be loved. What if he does drink and act roughly at times? A man of genius cannot be a saint in Russia. There he lives, cut off from the world by cold and storm and endless roads of bottomless mud, surrounded by a rough people who are crushed by poverty and disease, his life one continuous struggle, with never a day's respite; how can a man live like that for forty years and keep himself sober and unspotted? [Kissing SONIA] I wish you happiness with all my heart; you deserve it. [She gets up] As for me, I am a worthless, futile woman. I have always been futile; in music, in love, in my husband's house—in a word, in everything. When you come to think of it, Sonia, I am really very, very unhappy. [Walks excitedly up and down] Happiness can never exist for me in this world. Never. Why do you laugh?

SONIA. [Laughing and covering her face with her hands] I am so happy, so happy!

HELENA. I want to hear music. I might play a little.

SONIA. Oh, do, do! [She embraces her] I could not possibly go to sleep now. Do play!

HELENA. Yes, I will. Your father is still awake. Music irritates him when he is ill, but if he says I may, then I shall play a little. Go, Sonia, and ask him.

SONIA. Very well.

[She goes out. The WATCHMAN'S rattle is heard in the garden.]

HELENA. It is long since I have heard music. And now, I shall sit and play, and weep like a fool. [Speaking out of the window] Is that you rattling out there, Ephim?

VOICE OF THE WATCHMAN. It is I.

HELENA. Don't make such a noise. Your master is ill.

VOICE OF THE WATCHMAN. I am going away this minute. [Whistles a tune.]

SONIA. [Comes back] He says, no.

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The drawing-room of SEREBRAKOFF'S house. There are three doors: one to the right, one to the left, and one in the centre of the room. VOITSKI and SONIA are sitting down. HELENA is walking up and down, absorbed in thought.

VOITSKI. We were asked by the professor to be here at one o'clock. [Looks at his watch] It is now a quarter to one. It seems he has some communication to make to the world.

HELENA. Probably a matter of business.

VOITSKI. He never had any business. He writes twaddle, grumbles, and eats his heart out with jealousy; that's all he does.

SONIA. [Reproachfully] Uncle!

VOITSKI. All right. I beg your pardon. [He points to HELENA] Look at her. Wandering up and down from sheer idleness. A sweet picture, really.

HELENA. I wonder you are not bored, droning on in the same key from morning till night. [Despairingly] I am dying of this tedium. What shall I do?

SONIA. [Shrugging her shoulders] There is plenty to do if you would.

HELENA. For instance?

SONIA. You could help run this place, teach the children, care for the sick—isn't that enough? Before you and papa came, Uncle Vanya and I used to go to market ourselves to deal in flour.

HELENA. I don't know anything about such things, and besides, they don't interest me. It is only in novels that women go out and teach and heal the peasants; how can I suddenly begin to do it?

SONIA. How can you live here and not do it? Wait awhile, you will get used to it all. [Embraces her] Don't be sad, dearest. [Laughing] You feel miserable and restless, and can't seem to fit into this life, and your restlessness is catching. Look at Uncle Vanya, he does nothing now but haunt you like a shadow, and I have left my work to-day to come here and talk with you. I am getting lazy, and don't want to go on with it. Dr. Astroff hardly ever used to come here; it was all we could do to persuade him to visit us once a month, and now he has abandoned his forestry and his practice, and comes every day. You must be a witch.

VOITSKI. Why should you languish here? Come, my dearest, my beauty, be sensible! The blood of a Nixey runs in your veins. Oh, won't you let yourself be one? Give your nature the reins for once in your life; fall head over ears in love with some other water sprite and plunge down head first into a deep pool, so that the Herr Professor and all of us may have our hands free again.

HELENA. [Angrily] Leave me alone! How cruel you are! [She tries to go out.]

VOITSKI. [Preventing her] There, there, my beauty, I apologise. [He kisses her hand] Forgive me.

HELENA. Confess that you would try the patience of an angel.

VOITSKI. As a peace offering I am going to fetch some flowers which I picked for you this morning: some autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses. [He goes out.]

SONIA. Autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses!

[She and HELENA stand looking out of the window.]

HELENA. September already! How shall we live through the long winter here? [A pause] Where is the doctor?

SONIA. He is writing in Uncle Vanya's room. I am glad Uncle Vanya has gone out, I want to talk to you about something.

HELENA. About what?

SONIA. About what?

[She lays her head on HELENA'S breast.]

HELENA. [Stroking her hair] There, there, that will do. Don't, Sonia.

SONIA. I am ugly!

HELENA. You have lovely hair.

SONIA. Don't say that! [She turns to look at herself in the glass] No, when a woman is ugly they always say she has beautiful hair or eyes. I have loved him now for six years, I have loved him more than one loves one's mother. I seem to hear him beside me every moment of the day. I feel the pressure of his hand on mine. If I look up, I seem to see him coming, and as you see, I run to you to talk of him. He is here every day now, but he never looks at me, he does not notice my presence. It is agony. I have absolutely no hope, no, no hope. Oh, my God! Give me strength to endure. I prayed all last night. I often go up to him and speak to him and look into his eyes. My pride is gone. I am not mistress of myself. Yesterday I told Uncle Vanya I couldn't control myself, and all the servants know it. Every one knows that I love him.

HELENA. Does he?

SONIA. No, he never notices me.

HELENA. [Thoughtfully] He is a strange man. Listen, Sonia, will you allow me to speak to him? I shall be careful, only hint. [A pause] Really, to be in uncertainty all these years! Let me do it!

SONIA nods an affirmative.

HELENA. Splendid! It will be easy to find out whether he loves you or not. Don't be ashamed, sweetheart, don't worry. I shall be careful; he will not notice a thing. We only want to find out whether it is yes or no, don't we? [A pause] And if it is no, then he must keep away from here, is that so?

SONIA nods.

HELENA. It will be easier not to see him any more. We won't put off the examination an instant. He said he had a sketch to show me. Go and tell him at once that I want to see him.

SONIA. [In great excitement] Will you tell me the whole truth?

HELENA. Of course I will. I am sure that no matter what it is, it will be easier for you to bear than this uncertainty. Trust to me, dearest.

SONIA. Yes, yes. I shall say that you want to see his sketch. [She starts out, but stops near the door and looks back] No, it is better not to know—and yet—there may be hope.

HELENA. What do you say?

SONIA. Nothing. [She goes out.]

HELENA. [Alone] There is no greater sorrow than to know another's secret when you cannot help them. [In deep thought] He is obviously not in love with her, but why shouldn't he marry her? She is not pretty, but she is so clever and pure and good, she would make a splendid wife for a country doctor of his years. [A pause] I can understand how the poor child feels. She lives here in this desperate loneliness with no one around her except these colourless shadows that go mooning about talking nonsense and knowing nothing except that they eat, drink, and sleep. Among them appears from time to time this Dr. Astroff, so different, so handsome, so interesting, so charming. It is like seeing the moon rise on a dark night. Oh, to surrender oneself to his embrace! To lose oneself in his arms! I am a little in love with him myself! Yes, I am lonely without him, and when I think of him I smile. That Uncle Vanya says I have the blood of a Nixey in my veins: "Give rein to your nature for once in your life!" Perhaps it is right that I should. Oh, to be free as a bird, to fly away from all your sleepy faces and your talk and forget that you have existed at all! But I am a coward, I am afraid; my conscience torments me. He comes here every day now. I can guess why, and feel guilty already; I should like to fall on my knees at Sonia's feet and beg her forgiveness, and weep.

ASTROFF comes in carrying a portfolio.

ASTROFF. How do you do? [Shakes hands with her] Do you want to see my sketch?

HELENA. Yes, you promised to show me what you had been doing. Have you time now?

ASTROFF. Of course I have!

He lays the portfolio on the table, takes out the sketch and fastens it to the table with thumb-tacks.

ASTROFF. Where were you born?

HELENA. [Helping him] In St. Petersburg.

ASTROFF. And educated?

HELENA. At the Conservatory there.

ASTROFF. You don't find this life very interesting, I dare say?

HELENA. Oh, why not? It is true I don't know the country very well, but I have read a great deal about it.

ASTROFF. I have my own desk there in Ivan's room. When I am absolutely too exhausted to go on I drop everything and rush over here to forget myself in this work for an hour or two. Ivan and Miss Sonia sit rattling at their counting-boards, the cricket chirps, and I sit beside them and paint, feeling warm and peaceful. But I don't permit myself this luxury very often, only once a month. [Pointing to the picture] Look there! That is a map of our country as it was fifty years ago. The green tints, both dark and light, represent forests. Half the map, as you see, is covered with it. Where the green is striped with red the forests were inhabited by elk and wild goats. Here on this lake, lived great flocks of swans and geese and ducks; as the old men say, there was a power of birds of every kind. Now they have vanished like a cloud. Beside the hamlets and villages, you see, I have dotted down here and there the various settlements, farms, hermit's caves, and water-mills. This country carried a great many cattle and horses, as you can see by the quantity of blue paint. For instance, see how thickly it lies in this part; there were great herds of them here, an average of three horses to every house. [A pause] Now, look lower down. This is the country as it was twenty-five years ago. Only a third of the map is green now with forests. There are no goats left and no elk. The blue paint is lighter, and so on, and so on. Now we come to the third part; our country as it appears to-day. We still see spots of green, but not much. The elk, the swans, the black-cock have disappeared. It is, on the whole, the picture of a regular and slow decline which it will evidently only take about ten or fifteen more years to complete. You may perhaps object that it is the march of progress, that the old order must give place to the new, and you might be right if roads had been run through these ruined woods, or if factories and schools had taken their place. The people then would have become better educated and healthier and richer, but as it is, we have nothing of the sort. We have the same swamps and mosquitoes; the same disease and want; the typhoid, the diphtheria, the burning villages. We are confronted by the degradation of our country, brought on by the fierce struggle for existence of the human race. It is the consequence of the ignorance and unconsciousness of starving, shivering, sick humanity that, to save its children, instinctively snatches at everything that can warm it and still its hunger. So it destroys everything it can lay its hands on, without a thought for the morrow. And almost everything has gone, and nothing has been created to take its place. [Coldly] But I see by your face that I am not interesting you.

HELENA. I know so little about such things!

ASTROFF. There is nothing to know. It simply isn't interesting, that's all.

HELENA. Frankly, my thoughts were elsewhere. Forgive me! I want to submit you to a little examination, but I am embarrassed and don't know how to begin.

ASTROFF. An examination?

HELENA. Yes, but quite an innocent one. Sit down. [They sit down] It is about a certain young girl I know. Let us discuss it like honest people, like friends, and then forget what has passed between us, shall we?

ASTROFF. Very well.

HELENA. It is about my step-daughter, Sonia. Do you like her?

ASTROFF. Yes, I respect her.

HELENA. Do you like her—as a woman?

ASTROFF. [Slowly] No.

HELENA. One more word, and that will be the last. You have not noticed anything?

ASTROFF. No, nothing.

HELENA. [Taking his hand] You do not love her. I see that in your eyes. She is suffering. You must realise that, and not come here any more.

ASTROFF. My sun has set, yes, and then I haven't the time. [Shrugging his shoulders] Where shall I find time for such things? [He is embarrassed.]

HELENA. Bah! What an unpleasant conversation! I am as out of breath as if I had been running three miles uphill. Thank heaven, that is over! Now let us forget everything as if nothing had been said. You are sensible. You understand. [A pause] I am actually blushing.

ASTROFF. If you had spoken a month ago I might perhaps have considered it, but now—[He shrugs his shoulders] Of course, if she is suffering—but I cannot understand why you had to put me through this examination. [He searches her face with his eyes, and shakes his finger at her] Oho, you are wily!

HELENA. What does this mean?

ASTROFF. [Laughing] You are a wily one! I admit that Sonia is suffering, but what does this examination of yours mean? [He prevents her from retorting, and goes on quickly] Please don't put on such a look of surprise; you know perfectly well why I come here every day. Yes, you know perfectly why and for whose sake I come! Oh, my sweet tigress! don't look at me in that way; I am an old bird!

HELENA. [Perplexed] A tigress? I don't understand you.

ASTROFF. Beautiful, sleek tigress, you must have your victims! For a whole month I have done nothing but seek you eagerly. I have thrown over everything for you, and you love to see it. Now then, I am sure you knew all this without putting me through your examination. [Crossing his arms and bowing his head] I surrender. Here you have me—now, eat me.

HELENA. You have gone mad!

ASTROFF. You are afraid!

HELENA. I am a better and stronger woman than you think me. Good-bye. [She tries to leave the room.]

ASTROFF. Why good-bye? Don't say good-bye, don't waste words. Oh, how lovely you are—what hands! [He kisses her hands.]

HELENA. Enough of this! [She frees her hands] Leave the room! You have forgotten yourself.

ASTROFF. Tell me, tell me, where can we meet to-morrow? [He puts his arm around her] Don't you see that we must meet, that it is inevitable?

He kisses her. VOITSKI comes in carrying a bunch of roses, and stops in the doorway.

HELENA. [Without seeing VOITSKI] Have pity! Leave me, [lays her head on ASTROFF'S shoulder] Don't! [She tries to break away from him.]

ASTROFF. [Holding her by the waist] Be in the forest tomorrow at two o'clock. Will you? Will you?

HELENA. [Sees VOITSKI] Let me go! [Goes to the window deeply embarrassed] This is appalling!

VOITSKI. [Throws the flowers on a chair, and speaks in great excitement, wiping his face with his handkerchief] Nothing—yes, yes, nothing.

ASTROFF. The weather is fine to-day, my dear Ivan; the morning was overcast and looked like rain, but now the sun is shining again. Honestly, we have had a very fine autumn, and the wheat is looking fairly well. [Puts his map back into the portfolio] But the days are growing short.

HELENA. [Goes quickly up to VOITSKI] You must do your best; you must use all your power to get my husband and myself away from here to-day! Do you hear? I say, this very day!

VOITSKI. [Wiping his face] Oh! Ah! Oh! All right! I—Helena, I saw everything!

HELENA. [In great agitation] Do you hear me? I must leave here this very day!

SEREBRAKOFF, SONIA, MARINA, and TELEGIN come in.

TELEGIN. I am not very well myself, your Excellency. I have been limping for two days, and my head—

SEREBRAKOFF. Where are the others? I hate this house. It is a regular labyrinth. Every one is always scattered through the twenty-six enormous rooms; one never can find a soul. [Rings] Ask my wife and Madame Voitskaya to come here!

HELENA. I am here already.

SEREBRAKOFF. Please, all of you, sit down.

SONIA. [Goes up to HELENA and asks anxiously] What did he say?

HELENA. I'll tell you later.

SONIA. You are moved. [looking quickly and inquiringly into her face] I understand; he said he would not come here any more. [A pause] Tell me, did he?

HELENA nods.

SEREBRAKOFF. [To TELEGIN] One can, after all, become reconciled to being an invalid, but not to this country life. The ways of it stick in my throat and I feel exactly as if I had been whirled off the earth and landed on a strange planet. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen. Sonia! [SONIA does not hear. She is standing with her head bowed sadly forward on her breast] Sonia! [A pause] She does not hear me. [To MARINA] Sit down too, nurse. [MARINA sits down and begins to knit her stocking] I crave your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen; hang your ears, if I may say so, on the peg of attention. [He laughs.]

VOITSKI. [Agitated] Perhaps you do not need me—may I be excused?

SEREBRAKOFF. No, you are needed now more than any one.

VOITSKI. What is it you want of me?

SEREBRAKOFF. You—but what are you angry about? If it is anything I have done, I ask you to forgive me.

VOITSKI. Oh, drop that and come to business; what do you want?

MME. VOITSKAYA comes in.

SEREBRAKOFF. Here is mother. Ladies and gentlemen, I shall begin. I have asked you to assemble here, my friends, in order to discuss a very important matter. I want to ask you for your assistance and advice, and knowing your unfailing amiability I think I can count on both. I am a book-worm and a scholar, and am unfamiliar with practical affairs. I cannot, I find, dispense with the help of well-informed people such as you, Ivan, and you, Telegin, and you, mother. The truth is, manet omnes una nox, that is to say, our lives are in the hands of God, and as I am old and ill, I realise that the time has come for me to dispose of my property in regard to the interests of my family. My life is nearly over, and I am not thinking of myself, but I have a young wife and daughter. [A pause] I cannot continue to live in the country; we were not made for country life, and yet we cannot afford to live in town on the income derived from this estate. We might sell the woods, but that would be an expedient we could not resort to every year. We must find some means of guaranteeing to ourselves a certain more or less fixed yearly income. With this object in view, a plan has occurred to me which I now have the honour of presenting to you for your consideration. I shall only give you a rough outline, avoiding all details. Our estate does not pay on an average more than two per cent on the money invested in it. I propose to sell it. If we then invest our capital in bonds, it will earn us four to five per cent, and we should probably have a surplus over of several thousand roubles, with which we could buy a summer cottage in Finland—

VOITSKI. Hold on! Repeat what you just said; I don't think I heard you quite right.

SEREBRAKOFF. I said we would invest the money in bonds and buy a cottage in Finland with the surplus.

VOITSKI. No, not Finland—you said something else.

SEREBRAKOFF. I propose to sell this place.

VOITSKI. Aha! That was it! So you are going to sell the place? Splendid. The idea is a rich one. And what do you propose to do with my old mother and me and with Sonia here?

SEREBRAKOFF. That will be decided in due time. We can't do everything at once.

VOITSKI. Wait! It is clear that until this moment I have never had a grain of sense in my head. I have always been stupid enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonia. My father bought it as a wedding present for my sister, and I foolishly imagined that as our laws were made for Russians and not Turks, my sister's estate would come down to her child.

SEREBRAKOFF. Of course it is Sonia's. Has any one denied it? I don't want to sell it without Sonia's consent; on the contrary, what I am doing is for Sonia's good.

VOITSKI. This is absolutely incomprehensible. Either I have gone mad or—or—

MME. VOITSKAYA. Jean, don't contradict Alexander. Trust to him; he knows better than we do what is right and what is wrong.

VOITSKI. I shan't. Give me some water. [He drinks] Go ahead! Say anything you please—anything!

SEREBRAKOFF. I can't imagine why you are so upset. I don't pretend that my scheme is an ideal one, and if you all object to it I shall not insist. [A pause.]

TELEGIN. [With embarrassment] I not only nourish feelings of respect toward learning, your Excellency, but I am also drawn to it by family ties. My brother Gregory's wife's brother, whom you may know; his name is Constantine Lakedemonoff, and he used to be a magistrate—

VOITSKI. Stop, Waffles. This is business; wait a bit, we will talk of that later. [To SEREBRAKOFF] There now, ask him what he thinks; this estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRAKOFF. Ah! Why should I ask questions? What good would it do?

VOITSKI. The price was ninety-five thousand roubles. My father paid seventy and left a debt of twenty-five. Now listen! This place could never have been bought had I not renounced my inheritance in favour of my sister, whom I deeply loved—and what is more, I worked for ten years like an ox, and paid off the debt.

SEREBRAKOFF. I regret ever having started this conversation.

VOITSKI. Thanks entirely to my own personal efforts, the place is entirely clear of debts, and now, when I have grown old, you want to throw me out, neck and crop!

SEREBRAKOFF. I can't imagine what you are driving at.

VOITSKI. For twenty-five years I have managed this place, and have sent you the returns from it like the most honest of servants, and you have never given me one single word of thanks for my work, not one—neither in my youth nor now. You allowed me a meagre salary of five hundred roubles a year, a beggar's pittance, and have never even thought of adding a rouble to it.

SEREBRAKOFF. What did I know about such things, Ivan? I am not a practical man and don't understand them. You might have helped yourself to all you wanted.

VOITSKI. Yes, why did I not steal? Don't you all despise me for not stealing, when it would have been only justice? And I should not now have been a beggar!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [Sternly] Jean!

TELEGIN. [Agitated] Vanya, old man, don't talk in that way. Why spoil such pleasant relations? [He embraces him] Do stop!

VOITSKI. For twenty-five years I have been sitting here with my mother like a mole in a burrow. Our every thought and hope was yours and yours only. By day we talked with pride of you and your work, and spoke your name with veneration; our nights we wasted reading the books and papers which my soul now loathes.

TELEGIN. Don't, Vanya, don't. I can't stand it.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Wrathfully] What under heaven do you want, anyway?

VOITSKI. We used to think of you as almost superhuman, but now the scales have fallen from my eyes and I see you as you are! You write on art without knowing anything about it. Those books of yours which I used to admire are not worth one copper kopeck. You are a hoax!

SEREBRAKOFF. Can't any one make him stop? I am going!

HELENA. Ivan, I command you to stop this instant! Do you hear me?

VOITSKI. I refuse! [SEREBRAKOFF tries to get out of the room, but VOITSKI bars the door] Wait! I have not done yet! You have wrecked my life. I have never lived. My best years have gone for nothing, have been ruined, thanks to you. You are my most bitter enemy!

TELEGIN. I can't stand it; I can't stand it. I am going. [He goes out in great excitement.]

SEREBRAKOFF. But what do you want? What earthly right have you to use such language to me? Ruination! If this estate is yours, then take it, and let me be ruined!

HELENA. I am going away out of this hell this minute. [Shrieks] This is too much!

VOITSKI. My life has been a failure. I am clever and brave and strong. If I had lived a normal life I might have become another Schopenhauer or Dostoieffski. I am losing my head! I am going crazy! Mother, I am in despair! Oh, mother!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [Sternly] Listen, Alexander!

SONIA falls on her knees beside the nurse and nestles against her.

SONIA. Oh, nurse, nurse!

VOITSKI. Mother! What shall I do? But no, don't speak! I know what to do. [To SEREBRAKOFF] And you will understand me!

He goes out through the door in the centre of the room and MME. VOITSKAYA follows him.

SEREBRAKOFF. Tell me, what on earth is the matter? Take this lunatic out of my sight! I cannot possibly live under the same roof with him. His room [He points to the centre door] is almost next door to mine. Let him take himself off into the village or into the wing of the house, or I shall leave here at once. I cannot stay in the same house with him.

HELENA. [To her husband] We are leaving to-day; we must get ready at once for our departure.

SEREBRAKOFF. What a perfectly dreadful man!

SONIA. [On her knees beside the nurse and turning to her father. She speaks with emotion] You must be kind to us, papa. Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! [Controlling her despair] Have pity on us. Remember how Uncle Vanya and Granny used to copy and translate your books for you every night—every, every night. Uncle Vanya has toiled without rest; he would never spend a penny on us, we sent it all to you. We have not eaten the bread of idleness. I am not saying this as I should like to, but you must understand us, papa, you must be merciful to us.

HELENA. [Very excited, to her husband] For heaven's sake, Alexander, go and have a talk with him—explain!

SEREBRAKOFF. Very well, I shall have a talk with him, but I won't apologise for a thing. I am not angry with him, but you must confess that his behaviour has been strange, to say the least. Excuse me, I shall go to him.

[He goes out through the centre door.]

HELENA. Be gentle with him; try to quiet him. [She follows him out.]

SONIA. [Nestling nearer to MARINA] Nurse, oh, nurse!

MARINA. It's all right, my baby. When the geese have cackled they will be still again. First they cackle and then they stop.

SONIA. Nurse!

MARINA. You are trembling all over, as if you were freezing. There, there, little orphan baby, God is merciful. A little linden-tea, and it will all pass away. Don't cry, my sweetest. [Looking angrily at the door in the centre of the room] See, the geese have all gone now. The devil take them!

A shot is heard. HELENA screams behind the scenes. SONIA shudders.

MARINA. Bang! What's that?

SEREBRAKOFF. [Comes in reeling with terror] Hold him! hold him! He has gone mad!

HELENA and VOITSKI are seen struggling in the doorway.

HELENA. [Trying to wrest the revolver from him] Give it to me; give it to me, I tell you!

VOITSKI. Let me go, Helena, let me go! [He frees himself and rushes in, looking everywhere for SEREBRAKOFF] Where is he? Ah, there he is! [He shoots at him. A pause] I didn't get him? I missed again? [Furiously] Damnation! Damnation! To hell with him!

He flings the revolver on the floor, and drops helpless into a chair. SEREBRAKOFF stands as if stupefied. HELENA leans against the wall, almost fainting.

HELENA. Take me away! Take me away! I can't stay here—I can't!

VOITSKI. [In despair] Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?

SONIA. [Softly] Oh, nurse, nurse!

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

VOITSKI'S bedroom, which is also his office. A table stands near the window; on it are ledgers, letter scales, and papers of every description. Near by stands a smaller table belonging to ASTROFF, with his paints and drawing materials. On the wall hangs a cage containing a starling. There is also a map of Africa on the wall, obviously of no use to anybody. There is a large sofa covered with buckram. A door to the left leads into an inner room; one to the right leads into the front hall, and before this door lies a mat for the peasants with their muddy boots to stand on. It is an autumn evening. The silence is profound. TELEGIN and MARINA are sitting facing one another, winding wool.

TELEGIN. Be quick, Marina, or we shall be called away to say good-bye before you have finished. The carriage has already been ordered.

MARINA. [Trying to wind more quickly] I am a little tired.

TELEGIN. They are going to Kharkoff to live.

MARINA. They do well to go.

TELEGIN. They have been frightened. The professor's wife won't stay here an hour longer. "If we are going at all, let's be off," says she, "we shall go to Kharkoff and look about us, and then we can send for our things." They are travelling light. It seems, Marina, that fate has decreed for them not to live here.

MARINA. And quite rightly. What a storm they have just raised! It was shameful!

TELEGIN. It was indeed. The scene was worthy of the brush of Aibazofski.

MARINA. I wish I'd never laid eyes on them. [A pause] Now we shall have things as they were again: tea at eight, dinner at one, and supper in the evening; everything in order as decent folks, as Christians like to have it. [Sighs] It is a long time since I have eaten noodles.

TELEGIN. Yes, we haven't had noodles for ages. [A pause] Not for ages. As I was going through the village this morning, Marina, one of the shop-keepers called after me, "Hi! you hanger-on!" I felt it bitterly.

MARINA. Don't pay the least attention to them, master; we are all dependents on God. You and Sonia and all of us. Every one must work, no one can sit idle. Where is Sonia?

TELEGIN. In the garden with the doctor, looking for Ivan. They fear he may lay violent hands on himself.

MARINA. Where is his pistol?

TELEGIN. [Whispers] I hid it in the cellar.

VOITSKI and ASTROFF come in.

VOITSKI. Leave me alone! [To MARINA and TELEGIN] Go away! Go away and leave me to myself, if but for an hour. I won't have you watching me like this!

TELEGIN. Yes, yes, Vanya. [He goes out on tiptoe.]

MARINA. The gander cackles; ho! ho! ho!

[She gathers up her wool and goes out.]

VOITSKI. Leave me by myself!

ASTROFF. I would, with the greatest pleasure. I ought to have gone long ago, but I shan't leave you until you have returned what you took from me.

VOITSKI. I took nothing from you.

ASTROFF. I am not jesting, don't detain me, I really must go.

VOITSKI. I took nothing of yours.

ASTROFF. You didn't? Very well, I shall have to wait a little longer, and then you will have to forgive me if I resort to force. We shall have to bind you and search you. I mean what I say.

VOITSKI. Do as you please. [A pause] Oh, to make such a fool of myself! To shoot twice and miss him both times! I shall never forgive myself.

ASTROFF. When the impulse came to shoot, it would have been as well had you put a bullet through your own head.

VOITSKI. [Shrugging his shoulders] Strange! I attempted murder, and am not going to be arrested or brought to trial. That means they think me mad. [With a bitter laugh] Me! I am mad, and those who hide their worthlessness, their dullness, their crying heartlessness behind a professor's mask, are sane! Those who marry old men and then deceive them under the noses of all, are sane! I saw you kiss her; I saw you in each other's arms!

ASTROFF. Yes, sir, I did kiss her; so there. [He puts his thumb to his nose.]

VOITSKI. [His eyes on the door] No, it is the earth that is mad, because she still bears us on her breast.

ASTROFF. That is nonsense.

VOITSKI. Well? Am I not a madman, and therefore irresponsible? Haven't I the right to talk nonsense?

ASTROFF. This is a farce! You are not mad; you are simply a ridiculous fool. I used to think every fool was out of his senses, but now I see that lack of sense is a man's normal state, and you are perfectly normal.

VOITSKI. [Covers his face with his hands] Oh! If you knew how ashamed I am! These piercing pangs of shame are like nothing on earth. [In an agonised voice] I can't endure them! [He leans against the table] What can I do? What can I do?

ASTROFF. Nothing.

VOITSKI. You must tell me something! Oh, my God! I am forty-seven years old. I may live to sixty; I still have thirteen years before me; an eternity! How shall I be able to endure life for thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I fill them? Oh, don't you see? [He presses ASTROFF'S hand convulsively] Don't you see, if only I could live the rest of my life in some new way! If I could only wake some still, bright morning and feel that life had begun again; that the past was forgotten and had vanished like smoke. [He weeps] Oh, to begin life anew! Tell me, tell me how to begin.

ASTROFF. [Crossly] What nonsense! What sort of a new life can you and I look forward to? We can have no hope.

VOITSKI. None?

ASTROFF. None. Of that I am convinced.

VOITSKI. Tell me what to do. [He puts his hand to his heart] I feel such a burning pain here.

ASTROFF. [Shouts angrily] Stop! [Then, more gently] It may be that posterity, which will despise us for our blind and stupid lives, will find some road to happiness; but we—you and I—have but one hope, the

hope that we may be visited by visions, perhaps by pleasant ones, as we lie resting in our graves. [Sighing] Yes, brother, there were only two respectable, intelligent men in this county, you and I. Ten years or so of this life of ours, this miserable life, have sucked us under, and we have become as contemptible and petty as the rest. But don't try to talk me out of my purpose! Give me what you took from me, will you?

VOITSKI. I took nothing from you.

ASTROFF. You took a little bottle of morphine out of my medicine-case. [A pause] Listen! If you are positively determined to make an end to yourself, go into the woods and shoot yourself there. Give up the morphine, or there will be a lot of talk and guesswork; people will think I gave it to you. I don't fancy having to perform a post-mortem on you. Do you think I should find it interesting?

SONIA comes in.

VOITSKI. Leave me alone.

ASTROFF. [To SONIA] Sonia, your uncle has stolen a bottle of morphine out of my medicine-case and won't give it up. Tell him that his behaviour is—well, unwise. I haven't time, I must be going.

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine?

ASTROFF. Yes, he took it. [A pause] I am absolutely sure.

SONIA. Give it up! Why do you want to frighten us? [Tenderly] Give it up, Uncle Vanya! My misfortune is perhaps even greater than yours, but I am not plunged in despair. I endure my sorrow, and shall endure it until my life comes to a natural end. You must endure yours, too. [A pause] Give it up! Dear, darling Uncle Vanya. Give it up! [She weeps] You are so good, I am sure you will have pity on us and give it up. You must endure your sorrow, Uncle Vanya; you must endure it.

VOITSKI takes a bottle from the drawer of the table and hands it to ASTROFF.

VOITSKI. There it is! [To SONIA] And now, we must get to work at once; we must do something, or else I shall not be able to endure it.

SONIA. Yes, yes, to work! As soon as we have seen them off we shall go to work. [She nervously straightens out the papers on the table] Everything is in a muddle!

ASTROFF. [Putting the bottle in his case, which he straps together] Now I can be off.

HELENA comes in.

HELENA. Are you here, Ivan? We are starting in a moment. Go to Alexander, he wants to speak to you.

SONIA. Go, Uncle Vanya. [She takes VOITSKI 'S arm] Come, you and papa must make peace; that is absolutely necessary.

SONIA and VOITSKI go out.

HELENA. I am going away. [She gives ASTROFF her hand] Good-bye.

ASTROFF. So soon?

HELENA. The carriage is waiting.

ASTROFF. Good-bye.

HELENA. You promised me you would go away yourself to-day.

ASTROFF. I have not forgotten. I am going at once. [A pause] Were you frightened? Was it so terrible?

HELENA. Yes.

ASTROFF. Couldn't you stay? Couldn't you? To-morrow—in the forest—

HELENA. No. It is all settled, and that is why I can look you so bravely in the face. Our departure is fixed. One thing I must ask of you: don't think too badly of me; I should like you to respect me.

ASTROFF. Ah! [With an impatient gesture] Stay, I implore you! Confess that there is nothing for you to do in this world. You have no object in life; there is nothing to occupy your attention, and sooner or later your feelings must master you. It is inevitable. It would be better if it happened not in Kharkoff or in Kursk, but here, in nature's lap. It would then at least be poetical, even beautiful. Here you have the forests, the houses half in ruins that Turgenieff writes of.

HELENA. How comical you are! I am angry with you and yet I shall always remember you with pleasure. You are interesting and original. You and I will never meet again, and so I shall tell you—why should I conceal it?—that I am just a little in love with you. Come, one more last pressure of our hands, and then let us part good friends. Let us not bear each other any ill will.

ASTROFF. [Pressing her hand] Yes, go. [Thoughtfully] You seem to be sincere and good, and yet there is something strangely disquieting about all your personality. No sooner did you arrive here with your husband than every one whom you found busy and actively creating something was forced to drop his work and give himself up for the whole summer to your husband's gout and yourself. You and he have infected us with your idleness. I have been swept off my feet; I have not put my hand to a thing for weeks, during which sickness has been running its course unchecked among the people, and the peasants have been pasturing their cattle in my woods and young plantations. Go where you will, you and your husband will always carry destruction in your train. I am joking of course, and yet I am strangely sure that had you stayed here we should have been overtaken by the most immense desolation. I would have gone to my ruin, and you—you would not have prospered. So go! E finita la comedia!

HELENA. [Snatching a pencil off ASTROFF'S table, and hiding it with a quick movement] I shall take this pencil for memory!

ASTROFF. How strange it is. We meet, and then suddenly it seems that we must part forever. That is the way in this world. As long as we are alone, before Uncle Vanya comes in with a bouquet—allow me—to kiss you good-bye—may I? [He kisses her on the cheek] So! Splendid!

HELENA. I wish you every happiness. [She glances about her] For once in my life, I shall! and scorn the consequences! [She kisses him impetuously, and they quickly part] I must go.

ASTROFF. Yes, go. If the carriage is there, then start at once. [They stand listening.]

ASTROFF. E finita!

VOITSKI, SEREBRAKOFF, MME. VOITSKAYA with her book, TELEGIN, and SONIA come in.

SEREBRAKOFF. [To VOITSKI] Shame on him who bears malice for the past. I have gone through so much in the last few hours that I feel capable of writing a whole treatise on the conduct of life for the instruction of posterity. I gladly accept your apology, and myself ask your forgiveness. [He kisses VOITSKI three times.]

HELENA embraces SONIA.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Kissing MME. VOITSKAYA'S hand] Mother!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [Kissing him] Have your picture taken, Alexander, and send me one. You know how dear you are to me.

TELEGIN. Good-bye, your Excellency. Don't forget us.

SEREBRAKOFF. [Kissing his daughter] Good-bye, good-bye all. [Shaking hands with ASTROFF] Many thanks for your pleasant company. I have a deep regard for your opinions and your enthusiasm, but let me, as an old man, give one word of advice at parting: do something, my friend! Work! Do something! [They all bow] Good luck to you all. [He goes out followed by MME. VOITSKAYA and SONIA.]

VOITSKI [Kissing HELENA'S hand fervently] Good-bye—forgive me. I shall never see you again!

HELENA. [Touched] Good-bye, dear boy.

She lightly kisses his head as he bends over her hand, and goes out.

ASTROFF. Tell them to bring my carriage around too, Waffles.

TELEGIN. All right, old man.

ASTROFF and VOITSKI are left behind alone. ASTROFF collects his paints and drawing materials on the table and packs them away in a box.

ASTROFF. Why don't you go to see them off?

VOITSKI. Let them go! I—I can't go out there. I feel too sad. I must go to work on something at once. To work! To work!

He rummages through his papers on the table. A pause. The tinkling of bells is heard as the horses trot away.

ASTROFF. They have gone! The professor, I suppose, is glad to go. He couldn't be tempted back now by a fortune.

MARINA comes in.

MARINA. They have gone. [She sits down in an arm-chair and knits her stocking.]

SONIA comes in wiping her eyes.

SONIA. They have gone. God be with them. [To her uncle] And now, Uncle Vanya, let us do something!

VOITSKI. To work! To work!

SONIA. It is long, long, since you and I have sat together at this table. [She lights a lamp on the table] No ink! [She takes the inkstand to the cupboard and fills it from an ink-bottle] How sad it is to see them go!

MME. VOITSKAYA comes slowly in.

MME. VOITSKAYA. They have gone.

She sits down and at once becomes absorbed in her book. SONIA sits down at the table and looks through an account book.

SONIA. First, Uncle Vanya, let us write up the accounts. They are in a dreadful state. Come, begin. You take one and I will take the other.

VOITSKI. In account with [They sit silently writing.]

MARINA. [Yawning] The sand-man has come.

ASTROFF. How still it is. Their pens scratch, the cricket sings; it is so warm and comfortable. I hate to go. [The tinkling of bells is heard.]

ASTROFF. My carriage has come. There now remains but to say good-bye to you, my friends, and to my table here, and then—away! [He puts the map into the portfolio.]

MARINA. Don't hurry away; sit a little longer with us.

ASTROFF. Impossible.

VOITSKI. [Writing] And carry forward from the old debt two seventy-five—

WORKMAN comes in.

WORKMAN. Your carriage is waiting, sir.

ASTROFF. All right. [He hands the WORKMAN his medicine-case, portfolio, and box] Look out, don't crush the portfolio!

WORKMAN. Very well, sir.

SONIA. When shall we see you again?

ASTROFF. Hardly before next summer. Probably not this winter, though, of course, if anything should happen you will let me know. [He shakes hands with them] Thank you for your kindness, for your hospitality, for everything! [He goes up to MARINA and kisses her head] Good-bye, old nurse!

MARINA. Are you going without your tea?

ASTROFF. I don't want any, nurse.

MARINA. Won't you have a drop of vodka?

ASTROFF. [Hesitatingly] Yes, I might.

MARINA goes out.

ASTROFF. [After a pause] My off-wheeler has gone lame for some reason. I noticed it yesterday when Peter was taking him to water.

VOITSKI. You should have him re-shod.

ASTROFF. I shall have to go around by the blacksmith's on my way home. It can't be avoided. [He stands looking up at the map of Africa hanging on the wall] I suppose it is roasting hot in Africa now.

VOITSKI. Yes, I suppose it is.

MARINA comes back carrying a tray on which are a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.

MARINA. Help yourself.

ASTROFF drinks

MARINA. To your good health! [She bows deeply] Eat your bread with it.

ASTROFF. No, I like it so. And now, good-bye. [To MARINA] You needn't come out to see me off, nurse.

He goes out. SONIA follows him with a candle to light him to the carriage. MARINA sits down in her armchair.

VOITSKI. [Writing] On the 2d of February, twenty pounds of butter; on the 16th, twenty pounds of butter again. Buckwheat flour—[A pause. Bells are heard tinkling.]

MARINA. He has gone. [A pause.]

SONIA comes in and sets the candle stick on the table.

SONIA. He has gone.

VOITSKI. [Adding and writing] Total, fifteen—twenty-five—

SONIA sits down and begins to write.

[Yawning] Oh, ho! The Lord have mercy.

TELEGIN comes in on tiptoe, sits down near the door, and begins to tune his guitar.

VOITSKI. [To SONIA, stroking her hair] Oh, my child, I am miserable; if you only knew how miserable I am!

SONIA. What can we do? We must live our lives. [A pause] Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and through the long evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials that fate imposes on us; we shall work for others without rest, both now and when we are old; and when our last hour comes we shall meet it humbly, and there, beyond the grave, we shall say that we have suffered and wept, that our life was bitter, and God will have pity on us. Ah, then dear, dear Uncle, we shall see that bright and beautiful life; we shall rejoice and look back upon our sorrow here; a tender smile—and—we shall rest. I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith. [SONIA kneels down before her uncle and lays her head on his hands. She speaks in a weary voice] We shall rest. [TELEGIN plays softly on the guitar] We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel. We shall see all evil and all our pain sink away in the great compassion that shall enfold the world. Our life will be as peaceful and tender and sweet as a caress. I have faith; I have faith. [She wipes away her tears] My poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying! [Weeping] You have never known what happiness was, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait! We shall rest. [She embraces him] We shall rest. [The WATCHMAN'S rattle is heard in the garden; TELEGIN plays softly; MME. VOITSKAYA writes something on the margin of her pamphlet; MARINA knits her stocking] We shall rest.

The curtain slowly falls.

CHELKASH

An Episode

fromProject Gutenberg Etext of *Creatures That Once Were Men*, by Gorky

Darkened by the dust of the dock, the blue southern sky is murky;
the burning sun looks duskily into the greenish sea, as though
through a thin gray veil. It can find no reflection in the water,
continually cut up by the strokes of oars, the screws of steamers,
the deep, sharp keels of Turkish feluccas and other sailing vessels,
that pass in all directions, ploughing up the crowded harbor,
where the free waves of the sea, pent up within granite walls,
and crushed under the vast weights that glide over its crests,
beat upon the sides of the ships and on the bank; beat and complain,
churned up into foam and fouled with all sorts of refuse.

The jingle of the anchor chains, the rattle of the links
of the trucks that bring down the cargoes, the metallic clank
of sheets of iron falling on the stone pavement, the dull thud
of wood, the creaking of the carts plying for hire, the whistles
of the steamers, piercingly shrill and hoarsely roaring,
the shouts of dock laborers, sailors, and customs officers--
all these sounds melt into the deafening symphony of the
working day, that hovering uncertainty hangs over the harbor,
as though afraid to float upward and be lost.

And fresh waves of sound continually rise up from the earth
to join it; deep, grumbling, sullen reverberations setting
all around quaking; shrill, menacing notes that pierce the ear
and the dusty, sultry air.

The granite, the iron, the wood, the harbor pavement, the ships
and the men--all swelled the mighty strains of this frenzied,
impassioned hymn to Mercury. But the voices of men, scarcely audible
in it, were weak and ludicrous. And the men, too, themselves,
the first source of all that uproar, were ludicrous and pitiable:
their little figures, dusty, tattered, nimble, bent under the weight
of goods that lay on their backs, under the weight of cares
that drove them hither and thither, in the clouds of dust,
in the sea of sweltering heat and din, were so trivial and small
in comparison with the colossal iron monsters, the mountains of bales,
the thundering railway trucks and all that they had created.
Their own creation had enslaved them, and stolen away
their individual life.

As they lay letting off steam, the heavy giant steamers whistled
or hissed, or seemed to heave deep sighs, and in every sound that came

from them could be heard the mocking note of ironical contempt
for the gray, dusty shapes of men, crawling about their decks
and filling their deep holds with the fruits of their slavish toil.
Ludicrous and pitiable were the long strings of dock laborers bearing
on their backs thousands of tons of bread, and casting it into
the iron bellies of the ships to gain a few pounds of that same bread
to fill their own bellies--for their worse luck not made of iron,
but alive to the pangs of hunger.

The men, tattered, drenched with sweat, made dull by weariness,
and din and heat; and the mighty machines, created by
those men, shining, well-fed, serene, in the sunshine;
machines which in the last resort are, after all, not set in
motion by steam, but by the muscles and blood of their creators--
in this contrast was a whole poem of cruel and frigid irony.

The clamor oppressed the spirit, the dust fretted the nostrils and
blinded the eyes, the sweltering heat baked and exhausted the body,
and everything-buildings, men, pavement--seemed strained, breaking,
ready to burst, losing patience, on the verge of exploding into
some immense catastrophe, some outbreak, after which one would
be able to breathe freely and easily in the air refreshed by it.
On the earth there would be quietness; and that dusty uproar, deafening,
fretting the nerves, driving one to melancholy frenzy, would vanish;
and in town, and sea and sky, it would be still and clear and pleasant.
But that was only seeming. It seemed so because man has not yet
grown weary of hoping for better things, and the longing to feel free
is not dead in him.

Twelve times there rang out the regular musical peal of the bell.
When the last brazen clang had died away, the savage
orchestra of toil had already lost half its volume.
A minute later it had passed into a dull, repining grumble.
Now the voices of men and the splash of the sea could be heard
more clearly. The dinner-hour had come.

CHAPTER I

When the dock laborers, knocking off work, had scattered about the dock
in noisy groups, buying various edibles from the women hawking food,
and were settling themselves to dinner in shady corners on the pavement,
there walked into their midst Grishka Chelkash, an old hunted wolf,
well known to all the dock population as a hardened drunkard
and a bold and dexterous thief. He was barefoot and bareheaded,
clad in old, threadbare, shoddy breeches, in a dirty print shirt,

with a torn collar that displayed his mobile, dry, angular bones
tightly covered with brown skin. From the ruffled state of
his black, slightly grizzled hair and the dazed look on his keen,
predatory face, it was evident that he had only just waked up.
There was a straw sticking in one brown mustache, another straw
clung to the scrubby bristles of his shaved left cheek, and behind
his ear he had stuck a little, freshly-picked twig of lime.
Long, bony, rather stooping, he paced slowly over the flags,
and turning his hooked, rapacious-looking nose from side to side,
he cast sharp glances about him, his cold, gray eyes shining,
as he scanned one after another among the dock laborers.
His thick and long brown mustaches were continually twitching
like a cat's whiskers, while he rubbed his hands behind his back,
nervously clenching the long, crooked, clutching fingers.
Even here, among hundreds of striking-looking, tattered vagabonds
like himself, he attracted attention at once from his resemblance
to a vulture of the steppes, from his hungry-looking thinness,
and from that peculiar gait of his, as though pouncing down on his prey,
so smooth and easy in appearance, but inwardly intent and alert,
like the flight of the keen, nervous bird he resembled.

As he reached one of the groups of ragged dockers, reclining in
the shade of a stack of coal baskets, there rose to meet him
a thick-set young man, with purple blotches on his dull face and
scratches on his neck, unmistakable traces of a recent thrashing.
He got up and walked beside Chelkash, saying, in an undertone:

"The dock officers have got wind of the two cases of goods.
They're on the look-out. D'ye hear, Grishka?"

"What then?" queried Chelkash, cooly measuring him with his eyes.

"How 'what then?' They're on the look-out, I say. That's all."

"Did they ask for me to help them look?"

And with an acrid smile Chelkash looked toward the storehouse
of the Volunteer Fleet.

"You go to the devil!"

His companion turned away.

"Ha, wait a bit! Who's been decorating you like that?
Why, what a sight they have made of your signboard!
Have you seen Mishka here?"

"I've not seen him this long while!" the other shouted,

and hastily went back to his companions.

Chelkash went on farther, greeted by everyone as a familiar figure. But he, usually so lively and sarcastic, was unmistakably out of humor to-day, and made short and abrupt replies to all inquiries.

From behind a pile of goods emerged a customs-house officer, a dark green, dusty figure, of military erectness. He barred the way for Chelkash, standing before him in a challenging attitude, his left hand clutching the hilt of his dirk, while with his right he tried to seize Chelkash by the collar.

"Stop! Where are you going?"

Chelkash drew back a step, raised his eyes, looked at the official, and smiled dryly.

The red, good-humoredly crafty face of the official, in its attempt to assume a menacing air, puffed and grew round and purple, while the brows scowled, the eyes rolled, and the effect was very comic.

"You've been told--don't you dare come into the dock, or I'll break your ribs! And you're here again!" the man roared threateningly.

"How d'ye do, Semyonitch! It's a long while since we've seen each other," Chelkash greeted him calmly, holding out his hand.

"Thankful never to see you again! Get along, get along!"

But yet Semyonitch took the outstretched hand.

"You tell me this," Chelkash went on, his gripping fingers still keeping their hold of Semyonitch's hand, and shaking it with friendly familiarity, "haven't you seen Mishka?"

"Mishka, indeed, who's Mishka? I don't know any Mishka. Get along, mate! or the inspector'll see you, he'll----"

"The red-haired fellow that I worked with last time on the 'Kostroma'?" Chelkash persisted.

"That you steal with, you'd better say. He's been taken to the hospital, your Mishka; his foot was crushed by an iron bar. Go away, mate, while you're asked to civilly, go away, or I'll chuck you out by the scruff of your neck."

"A-ha, that's like you! And you say-you don't know Mishka! But I say,

why are you so cross, Semyonitch?"

"I tell you, Grishka, don't give me any of your jaw. Go---o!"

The official began to get angry and, looking from side to side,
tried to pull his hand away from Chelkash's firm grip.
Chelkash looked calmly at him from under his thick eyebrows,
smiled behind his mustache and not letting go of his hand,
went on talking.

"Don't hurry me. I'll just have my chat out with you, and then I'll go.
Come, tell us how you're getting on; wife and children quite well?"
And with a spiteful gleam in his eyes, he added, showing his teeth in a
mocking grin: "I've been meaning to pay you a call for ever so long,
but I've not had the time, I'm always drinking, you see."

"Now--now then-you drop that! You--none of your jokes, you bony devil.
I'm in earnest, my man. So you mean you're coming stealing in the houses
and the streets?"

"What for? Why there's goods enough here to last our time--for you
and me. By God, there's enough, Semyonitch! So you've been filching
two cases of goods, eh? Mind, Semyonitch, you'd better look out?
You'll get caught one day!"

Enraged by Chelkash's insolence, Semyonitch turned blue, and struggled,
spluttering and trying to say something.

Chelkash let go of his hand, and with complete composure
strode back to the dock gates. The customs-house officer
followed him, swearing furiously. Chelkash grew more cheerful;
he whistled shrilly through his teeth, and thrusting his hands
in his breeches pockets, walked with the deliberate gait of a man
of leisure, firing off to right and to left biting jeers and jests.
He was followed by retorts in the same vein.

"I say, Grishka, what good care they do take of you!
Made your inspection, eh?" shouted one out of a group of dockers,
who had finished dinner and were lying on the ground, resting.

"I'm barefoot, so here's Semyonitch watching that I shouldn't
graze my foot on anything," answered Chelkash.

They reached the gates. Two soldiers felt Chelkash all over,
and gave him a slight shove into the streets.

"Don't let him go!" wailed Semyonitch, who had stayed behind
in the dockyard.

Chelkash crossed the road and sat down on a stone post
opposite the door of the inn. From the dock gates rolled
rumbling an endless string of laden carts. To meet them,
rattled empty carts, with their drivers jolting up and down in them.
The dock vomited howling din and biting dust, and set
the earth quaking.

Chelkash, accustomed to this frenzied uproar, and roused
by his scene with Semyonitch, felt in excellent spirits.
Before him lay the attractive prospect of a substantial haul,
which would call for some little exertion and a great deal
of dexterity; Chelkash was confident that he had plenty of
the latter, and, half-closing his eyes, dreamed of how he would
indulge to~morrow morning when the business would be over
and the notes would be rustling in his pocket.

Then he thought of his comrade, Mishka, who would have
been very useful that night, if he had not hurt his foot;
Chelkash swore to himself, thinking that, all alone, without Mishka,
maybe he'd hardly manage it all. What sort of night would it be?
Chelkash looked at the sky, and along the street.

Half-a-dozen paces from him, on the flagged pavement, there sat,
leaning against a stone post, a young fellow in a coarse blue linen shirt,
and breeches of the same, in plaited bark shoes, and a torn, reddish cap.
Near him lay a little bag, and a scythe without a handle,
with a wisp of hay twisted round it and carefully tied with string.
The youth was broad-shouldered, squarely built, flaxen headed,
with a sunburnt and weather-beaten face, and big blue eyes that stared
with confident simplicity at Chelkash.

Chelkash grinned at him, put out his tongue, and making a fearful face,
stared persistently at him with wide-open eyes.

The young fellow at first blinked in bewilderment, but then,
suddenly bursting into a guffaw, shouted through his laughter:
"Oh! you funny chap!" and half getting up from the ground,
rolled clumsily from his post to Chelkash's, upsetting his bag
into the dust, and knocking the heel of his scythe on the stone.

"Eh, mate, you've been on the spree, one can see!" he said to Chelkash,
pulling at his trousers.

"That's so, suckling, that's so indeed!" Chelkash admitted frankly;
he took at once to this healthy, simple-hearted youth, with his childish
clear eyes. "Been off mowing, eh?"

"To be sure! You've to mow a verst to earn ten kopecks!
It's a poor business! Folks--in masses! Men had come tramping
from the famine parts. They've knocked down the prices,
go where you will. Sixty kopecks they paid in Kuban.
And in years gone by, they do say, it was three, and four,
and five roubles."

"In years gone by! Why, in years gone by, for the mere
sight of a Russian they paid three roubles out that way.
Ten years ago I used to make a regular trade of it.
One would go to a settlement--'I'm a Russian,' one said--
and they'd come and gaze at you at once, touch you,
wonder at you, and--you'd get three roubles. And they'd give
you food and drink--stay as long as you like!"

As the youth listened to Chelkash, at first his mouth dropped open,
his round face expressing bewildered rapture; then, grasping the fact
that this tattered fellow was romancing, he closed his lips with a
smack and guffawed. Chelkash kept a serious face, hiding a smile
in his mustache.

"You funny chap, you chaff away as though it were the truth,
and I listen as if it were a bit of news! No, upon my soul,
in years gone by----"

"Why, and didn't I say so? To be sure, I'm telling you
how in years gone by----"

"Go on!" the lad waved his hand. "A cobbler, eh? or a tailor?
or what are you?"

"I?" Chelkash queried, and after a moment's thought he said:
"I'm a fisherman."

"A fisherman! Really? You catch fish?"

"Why fish? Fishermen about here don't catch fish only.
They fish more for drowned men, old anchors, sunk ships--everything!
There are hooks on purpose for all that."

"Go on! That sort of fishermen, maybe, that sing of themselves:

 "We cast our nets
 Over banks that are dry,
 Over storerooms and pantries!"

"Why, have you seen any of that sort?" inquired Chelkash,
looking scoffingly at him and thinking that this nice youth

was very stupid.

"No, seen them I haven't! I've heard tell."

"Do you like them?"

"Like them? May be. They're all right, fine bold chaps--free."

"And what's freedom to you? Do you care for freedom?"

"Well, I should think so! Be your own master, go where you please,
do as you like. To be sure! If you know how to behave yourself,
and you've nothing weighing upon you--it's first rate.
Enjoy yourself all you can, only be mindful of God."

Chelkash spat contemptuously, and turning away from the youth,
dropped the conversation.

"Here's my case now," the latter began, with sudden animation.
"As my father's dead, my bit of land's small, my mother's old,
all the land's sucked dry, what am I to do? I must live.
And how? There's no telling.

"Am I to marry into some well-to-do house? I'd be glad to,
if only they'd let their daughter have her share apart.

"Not a bit of it, the devil of a father-in-law won't consent to that.
And so I shall have to slave for him--for ever so long--for years.
A nice state of things, you know!

"But if I could earn a hundred or a hundred and fifty roubles,
I could stand on my own feet, and look askance at old Antip,
and tell him straight out! Will you give Marfa her share apart?
No? all right, then! Thank God, she's not the only girl in the village.
And I should be, I mean, quite free and independent.

"Ah, yes!" the young man sighed. "But as 'tis, there's nothing for it,
but to marry and live at my father-in-law's. I was thinking I'd go,
d'ye see, to Kuban, and make some two hundred roubles-straight off!
Be a gentleman! But there, it was no go! It didn't come off.
Well, I suppose I'll have to work for my father-in-law!
Be a day-laborer. For I'll never manage on my own bit--
not anyhow. Heigh-ho!"

The lad extremely disliked the idea of bondage to his future
father-in-law. His face positively darkened and looked gloomy.
He shifted clumsily on the ground and drew Chelkash out of
the reverie into which he had sunk during his speech.

Chelkash felt that he had no inclination now to talk to him,
yet he asked him another question: "Where are you going now?"

"Why, where should I go? Home, to be sure."

"Well, mate, I couldn't be sure of that, you might be on your
way to Turkey."

"To Th-urkey!" drawled the youth. "Why, what good Christian
ever goes there! Well I never!"

"Oh, you fool!" sighed Chelkash, and again he turned away from
his companion, conscious this time of a positive disinclination
to waste another word on him. This stalwart village lad roused
some feeling in him. It was a vague feeling of annoyance,
that grew instinctively, stirred deep down in his heart,
and hindered him from concentrating himself on the consideration
of all that he had to do that night.

The lad he had thus reviled muttered something,
casting occasionally a dubious glance at Chelkash.
His cheeks were comically puffed out, his lips parted,
and his eyes were screwed up and blinking with extreme rapidity.
He had obviously not expected so rapid and insulting a termination
to his conversation with this long-whiskered ragamuffin.
The ragamuffin took no further notice of him.
He whistled dreamily, sitting on the stone post, and beating
time on it with his bare, dirty heel.

The young peasant wanted to be quits with him.

"Hi, you there, fisherman! Do you often get tipsy like this?"
he was beginning, but at the same instant the fisherman turned
quickly towards him, and asked:

"I say, suckling! Would you like a job to-night
with me? Eh? Tell me quickly!"

"What sort of a job?" the lad asked him, distrustfully.

"What! What I set you. We're going fishing. You'll row the boat."

"Well. Yes. All right. I don't mind a job. Only there's this.
I don't want to get into a mess with you. You're so awfully deep.
You're rather shady."

Chelkash felt a scalding sensation in his breast, and with cold

anger he said in a low voice:

"And you'd better hold your tongue, whatever you think, or I'll give
you a tap on your nut that will make things light enough."

He jumped up from his post, tugged at his moustache with his left hand,
while his sinewy right hand was clenched into a fist, hard as iron,
and his eyes gleamed.

The youth was frightened. He looked quickly round him,
and blinking uneasily, he, too, jumped up from the ground.
Measuring one another with their eyes, they paused.

"Well?" Chelkash queried, sullenly. He was boiling inwardly,
and trembling at the affront dealt him by this young calf,
whom he had despised while he talked to him, but now hated
all at once because he had such clear blue eyes, such health,
a sunburned face, and broad, strong hands; because he had somewhere
a village, a home in it, because a well-to-do peasant wanted
him for a son-in-law, because of all his life, past and future,
and most of all, because he--this babe compared with Chelkash--
dared to love freedom, which he could not appreciate, nor need.
It is always unpleasant to see that a man one regards as baser
or lower than oneself likes or hates the same things, and so puts
himself on a level with oneself.

The young peasant looked at Chelkash and saw in him an employer.

"Well," he began, "I don't mind. I'm glad of it. Why, it's work for,
you or any other man. I only meant that you don't look like a
working man--a bit too-ragged. Oh, I know that may happen to anyone.
Good Lord, as though I've never seen drunkards! Lots of them!
and worse than you too."

"All right, all right! Then you agree?" Chelkash said more amicably.

"I? Ye-es! With pleasure! Name your terms."

"That's according to the job. As the job turns out.
According to the job. Five roubles you may get.
Do you see?"

But now it was a question of money, and in that the peasant wished
to be precise, and demanded the same exactness from his employer.
His distrust and suspicion revived.

"That's not my way of doing business, mate! A bird in the hand for me."

Chelkash threw himself into his part.

"Don't argue, wait a bit! Come into the restaurant."

And they went down the street side by side, Chelkash with
the dignified air of an employer, twisting his mustaches,
the youth with an expression of absolute readiness to give
way to him, but yet full of distrust and uneasiness.

"And what's your name?" asked Chelkash.

"Gavrilo!" answered the youth.

When they had come into the dirty and smoky eating-house, and Chelkash
going up to the counter, in the familiar tone of an habitual customer,
ordered a bottle of vodka, cabbage soup, a cut from the joint, and tea,
and reckoning up his order, flung the waiter a brief "put it all down!"
to which the waiter nodded in silence,--Gavrilo was at once filled
with respect for this ragamuffin, his employer, who enjoyed here such
an established and confident position.

"Well, now we'll have a bit of lunch and talk things over.
You sit still, I'll be back in a minute."

He went out. Gavrilo looked round. The restaurant was in an
underground basement; it was damp and dark, and reeked with the
stifling fumes of vodka, tobacco-smoke, tar, and some acrid odor.
Facing Gavrilo at another table sat a drunken man in the dress
of a sailor, with a red beard, all over coal-dust and tar.
Hiccupping every minute, he was droning a song all made up of broken
and incoherent words, strangely sibilant and guttural sounds.
He was unmistakably not a Russian.

Behind him sat two Moldavian women, tattered, black-haired sunburned
creatures, who were chanting some sort of song, too, with drunken voices.

And from the darkness beyond emerged other figures,
all strangely dishevelled, all half-drunk, noisy and restless.

Gavrilo felt miserable here alone. He longed for his employer to come
back quickly. And the din in the eating-house got louder and louder.
Growing shriller every second, it all melted into one note,
and it seemed like the roaring of some monstrous boast, with hundreds
of different throats, vaguely enraged, trying to struggle out of this
damp hole and unable to find a way out to freedom.

Gavrilo felt something intoxicating and oppressive creeping over him,
over all his limbs, making his head reel, and his eyes grow dim,

as they moved inquisitively about the eating-house.

Chelkash came in, and they began eating and drinking and talking.
At the third glass Gavrilo was drunk. He became lively and wanted to say
something pleasant to his employer, who--the good fellow!--though he
had done nothing for him yet, was entertaining him so agreeably.
But the words which flowed in perfect waves to his throat, for some
reason would not come from his tongue.

Chelkash looked at him and smiled sarcastically, saying:

"You're screwed! Ugh--milksop!--with five glasses! how will you work?"

"Dear fellow!" Gavrilo melted into a drunken, good-natured smile.
"Never fear! I respect you! That is, look here!
Let me kiss you! eh?"

"Come, come! A drop more!"

Gavrilo drank, and at last reached a condition when everything
seemed waving up and down in regular undulations before his eyes.
It was unpleasant and made him feel sick. His face wore
an expression of childish bewilderment and foolish enthusiasm.
Trying to say something, he smacked his lips absurdly and bellowed.
Chelkash, watching him intently, twisted his mustaches,
and as though recollecting something, still smiled to himself,
but morosely now and maliciously.

The eating-house roared with drunken clamor. The red-headed
sailor was asleep, with his elbows on the table.

"Come, let's go then!" said Chelkash, getting up.

Gavrilo tried to get up, but could not, and with a vigorous oath,
he laughed a meaningless, drunken laugh.

"Quite screwed!" said Chelkash, sitting down again opposite him.

Gavrilo still guffawed, staring with dull eyes at his new employer.
And the latter gazed at him intently, vigilantly and thoughtfully.
He saw before him a man whose life had fallen into his wolfish clutches.
He, Chelkash, felt that he had the power to do with it as he pleased.
He could rend it like a card, and he could help to set it on a firm
footing in its peasant framework. He reveled in feeling himself
master of another man, and thought that never would this peasant-lad
drink of such a cup as destiny had given him, Chelkash, to drink.
And he envied this young life and pitied it, sneered at it, and was
even troubled over it, picturing to himself how it might again fall

into such hands as his.

And all these feelings in the end melted in Chelkash into one--
a fatherly sense of proprietorship in him. He felt sorry for
the boy, and the boy was necessary to him. Then Chelkash took
Gavrilo under the arms, and giving him a slight shove behind
with his knee, got him out into the yard of the eating-house,
where he put him on the ground in the shade of a stack of wood,
then he sat down beside him and lighted his pipe.

Gavrilo shifted about a little, muttered, and dropped asleep.

CHAPTER II.

"Come, ready?" Chelkash asked in a low voice of Gavrilo,
who was busy doing something to the oars.

"In a minute! The rowlock here's unsteady, can I just knock
it in with the oar?"

"No--no! Not a sound! Push it down harder with your hand,
it'll go in of itself."

They were both quietly getting out a boat, which was tied to the stern
of one of a whole flotilla of oakladen barges, and big Turkish feluccas,
half unloaded, hall still full of palm-oil, sandal wood, and thick
trunks of cypress.

The night was dark, thick strata of ragged clouds were moving
across the sky, and the sea was quiet, black, and thick as oil.
It wafted a damp and salt aroma, and splashed caressingly on the sides
of the vessels and the banks, setting Chelkash's boat lightly rocking.
There were boats all round them. At a long distance from the shore rose
from the sea the dark outlines of vessels, thrusting up into the dark
sky their pointed masts with various colored lights at their tops.
The sea reflected the lights, and was spotted with masses of yellow,
quivering patches. This was very beautiful on the velvety bosom
of the soft, dull black water, so rhythmically, mightily breathing.
The sea slept the sound, healthy sleep of a workman, wearied out
by his day's toil.

"We're off!" said Gavrilo, dropping the oars into the water.

"Yes!" With a vigorous turn of the rudder Chelkash drove
the boat into a strip of water between two barks, and they
darted rapidly over the smooth surface, that kindled into
bluish phosphorescent light under the strokes of the oars.
Behind the boat's stern lay a winding ribbon of this phosphorescence,

broad and quivering.

"Well, how's your head, aching?" asked Chelkash, smiling.

"Awfully! Like iron ringing. I'll wet it with some water in a minute."

"Why? You'd better wet your inside, that may get rid of it.
You can do that at once." He held out a bottle to Gavrilo.

"Eh? Lord bless you!"

There was a faint sound of swallowing.

"Aye! aye! like it? Enough!" Chelkash stopped him.

The boat darted on again, noiselessly and lightly threading its way among
the vessels. All at once, they emerged from the labyrinth of ships,
and the sea, boundless, mute, shining and rhythmically breathing,
lay open before them, stretching far into the distance,
where there rose out of its waters masses of storm clouds,
some lilac-blue with fluffy yellow edges, and some greenish like
the color of the seawater, or those dismal, leaden-colored clouds
that cast such heavy, dreary shadows, oppressing mind and soul.
They crawled slowly after one another, one melting into another,
one overtaking another, and there was something weird in this slow
procession of soulless masses.

It seemed as though there, at the sea's rim, they were a
countless multitude, that they would forever crawl thus sluggishly
over the sky, striving with dull malignance to hinder it from
peeping at the sleeping sea with its millions of golden eyes,
the various colored, vivid stars, that shine so dreamily
and stir high hopes in all who love their pure, holy light.
Over the sea hovered the vague, soft sound of its drowsy breathing.

"The sea's fine, eh?" asked Chelkash.

"It's all right! Only I feel scared on it," answered Gavrilo,
pressing the oars vigorously and evenly through the water.
The water faintly gurgled and splashed under the strokes of his long oars,
splashed glittering with the warm, bluish, phosphorescent light.

"Scared! What a fool!" Chelkash muttered, discontentedly.

He, the thief and cynic, loved the sea. His effervescent,
nervous nature, greedy after impressions, was never weary
of gazing at that dark expanse, boundless, free, and mighty.
And it hurt him to hear such an answer to his question

about the beauty of what he loved. Sitting in the stern,
he cleft the water with his oar, and looked on ahead quietly,
filled with desire to glide far on this velvety surface,
not soon to quit it.

On the sea there always rose up in him a broad,
warm feeling, that took possession of his whole soul,
and somewhat purified it from the sordidness of daily life.
He valued this, and loved to feel himself better out here in
the midst of the water and the air, where the cares of life,
and life itself, always lose, the former their keenness,
the latter its value.

"But where's the tackle? Eh?" Gavrilo asked suspiciously all at once,
peering into the boat.

Chelkash started.

"Tackle? I've got it in the stern."

"Why, what sort of tackle is it?" Gavrilo inquired again with surprised
suspicion in his tone.

"What sort? lines and--" But Chelkash felt ashamed to lie to this boy,
to conceal his real plans, and he was sorry to lose what this peasant-lad
had destroyed in his heart by this question. He flew into a rage.
That scalding bitterness he knew so well rose in his breast and
his throat, and impressively, cruelly, and malignantly he said to Gavrilo:

"You're sitting here--and I tell you, you'd better sit quiet.
And not poke your nose into what's not your business.
You've been hired to row, and you'd better row. But if you
can't keep your tongue from wagging, it will be a bad lookout
for you. D'ye see?"

For a minute the boat quivered and stopped. The oars rested in the water,
setting it foaming, and Gavrilo moved uneasily on his seat.

"Row!"

A sharp oath rang out in the air. Gavrilo swung the oars.
The boat moved with rapid, irregular jerks, noisily cutting the water.

"Steady!"

Chelkash got up from the stern, still holding the oars in his hands, and
peering with his cold eyes into the pale and twitching face of Gavrilo.
Crouching forward Chelkash was like a cat on the point of springing.

There was the sound of angry gnashing of teeth.

"Who's calling?" rang out a surly shout from the sea.

"Now, you devil, row! quietly with the oars! I'll kill you,
you cur. Come, row! One, two! There! you only make a sound!
I'll cut your throat!" hissed Chelkash.

"Mother of God--Holy Virgin--" muttered Gavrilo, shaking and numb
with terror and exertion.

The boat turned smoothly and went back toward the harbor,
where the lights gathered more closely into a group of many
colors and the straight stems of masts could be seen.

"Hi! Who's shouting?" floated across again. The voice was farther
off this time. Chelkash grew calm again.

"It's yourself, friend, that's shouting!" he said in the direction
of the shouts, and then he turned to Gavrilo, who was muttering a prayer.

"Well, mate, you're in luck! If those devils had overtaken us,
it would have been all over with you. D'you see?
I'd have you over in a trice--to the fishes!"

Now, when Chelkash was speaking quietly and even good-humoredly,
Gavrilo, still shaking with terror, besought him!

"Listen, forgive me! For Christ's sake, I beg you, let me go!
Put me on shore somewhere! Aie-aie-aie! I'm done for entirely!
Come, think of God, let me go! What am I to you?
I can't do it! I've never been used to such things.
It's the first time. Lord! Why, I shall be lost!
How did you get round me, mate? eh? It's a shame of you!
Why, you're ruining a man's life! Such doings."

"What doings?" Chelkash asked grimly. "Eh? Well, what doings?"

He was amused by the youth's terror, and he enjoyed it and the sense
that he, Chelkash, was a terrible person.

"Shady doings, mate. Let me go, for God's sake!
What am I to you? eh? Good--dear--!"

"Hold your tongue, do! If you weren't wanted, I shouldn't
have taken you. Do you understand? So, shut up!"

"Lord!" Gavrilo sighed, sobbing.

"Come, come! you'd better mind!" Chelkash cut him short.

But Gavrilo by now could not restrain himself, and quietly sobbing,
he wept, sniffed, and writhed in his seat, yet rowed
vigorously, desperately. The boat shot on like an arrow.
Again dark hulks of ships rose up on their way and the boat
was again lost among them, winding like a wolf in the narrow
lanes of water between them.

"Here, you listen! If anyone asks you anything,--hold your tongue,
if you want to get off alive! Do you see?"

"Oh--oh!" Gavrilo sighed hopelessly in answer to the grim advice,
and bitterly he added: "I'm a lost man!"

"Don't howl!" Chelkash whispered impressively.

This whisper deprived Gavrilo of all power of grasping anything
and transformed him into a senseless automaton, wholly absorbed
in a chill presentiment of calamity.

Mechanically he lowered the oars into the water,
threw himself back, drew them out and dropped them in again,
all the while staring blankly at his plaited shoes.
The waves splashed against the vessels with a sort of menace,
a sort of warning in their drowsy sound that terrified him.
The dock was reached. From its granite wall came the sound of
men's voices, the splash of water, singing, and shrill whistles.

"Stop!" whispered Chelkash. "Give over rowing!
Push along with your hands on the wall! Quietly, you devil!"

Gavrilo, clutching at the slippery stone, pushed the boat alongside
the wall. The boat moved without a sound, sliding alongside
the green, shiny stone.

"Stop! Give me the oars! Give them here. Where's your passport?
In the bag? Give me the bag! Come, give it here quickly!
That, my dear fellow, is so you shouldn't run off. You won't
run away now. Without oars you might have got off somehow,
but without a passport you'll be afraid to. Wait here!
But mind--if you squeak--to the bottom of the sea you go!"

And, all at once, clinging on to something with his hands,
Chelkash rose in the air and vanished onto the wall.

Gavrilo shuddered. It had all happened so quickly. He felt as though

the cursed weight and horror that had crushed him in the presence
of this thin thief with his mustaches was loosened and rolling off him.
Now to run! And breathing freely, he looked round him.
On his left rose a black hulk, without masts, a sort of huge coffin,
mute, untenanted, and desolate.

Every splash of the water on its sides awakened a hollow,
resonant echo within it, like a heavy sigh.

On the right the damp stone wall of the quay trailed its length,
winding like a heavy, chill serpent. Behind him, too, could be
seen black blurs of some sort, while in front, in the opening
between the wall and the side of that coffin, he could see the sea,
a silent waste, with the storm-clouds crawling above it.
Everything was cold, black, malignant. Gavrilo felt panic-stricken.
This terror was worse than the terror inspired in him by Chelkash;
it penetrated into Gavrilo's bosom with icy keenness, huddled him
into a cowering mass, and kept him nailed to his seat in the boat.

All around was silent. Not a sound but the sighs of the sea,
and it seemed as though this silence would instantly be rent
by something fearful, furiously loud, something that would
shake the sea to its depths, tear apart these heavy flocks
of clouds on the sky, and scatter all these black ships.
The clouds were crawling over the sky as dismally as before;
more of them still rose up out of the sea, and, gazing at the sky,
one might believe that it, too, was a sea, but a sea in agitation,
and grown petrified in its agitation, laid over that other
sea beneath, that was so drowsy, serene, and smooth.
The clouds were like waves, flinging themselves with curly
gray crests down upon the earth and into the abysses of space,
from which they were torn again by the wind, and tossed back
upon the rising billows of cloud, that were not yet hidden
under the greenish foam of their furious agitation.

Gavrilo felt crushed by this gloomy stillness and beauty,
and felt that he longed to see his master come back quickly.
And how was it that he lingered there so long? The time
passed slowly, more slowly than those clouds crawled over the sky.
And the stillness grew more malignant as time went on.
From the wall of the quay came the sound of splashing,
rustling, and something like whispering. It seemed to Gavrilo
that he would die that moment.

"Hi! Asleep? Hold it! Carefully!" sounded the hollow voice of Chelkash.

From the wall something cubical and heavy was let down.
Gavrilo took it into the boat. Something else like it followed.

Then across the wall stretched Chelkash's long figure, the oars appeared from somewhere, Gavrilo's bag dropped at his feet, and Chelkash, breathing heavily, settled himself in the stern.

Gavrilo gazed at him with a glad and timid smile.

"Tired?"

"Bound to be that, calf! Come now, row your best! Put your back into it! You've earned good wages, mate. Half the job's done. Now we've only to slip under the devils' noses, and then you can take your money and go off to your Mashka. You've got a Mashka, I suppose, eh, kiddy?"

"N--no!" Gavrilo strained himself to the utmost, working his chest like a pair of bellows, and his arms like steel springs. The water gurgled under the boat, and the blue streak behind the stern was broader now. Gavrilo was soaked through with sweat at once, but he still rowed on with all his might.

After living through such terror twice that night, he dreaded now having to go through it a third time, and longed for one thing only--to make an end quickly of this accursed task, to get on to land, and to run away from this man, before he really did kill him, or get him into prison. He resolved not to speak to him about anything, not to contradict him, to do all he told him, and, if he should succeed in getting successfully quit of him, to pay for a thanksgiving service to be said to-morrow to Nikolai the Wonder-worker. A passionate prayer was ready to burst out from his bosom. But he restrained himself, puffed like a steamer, and was silent, glancing from under his brows at Chelkash.

The latter, with his lean, long figure bent forward like a bird about to take flight, stared into the darkness ahead of the boat with his hawk eyes, and turning his rapacious, hooked nose from side to side, gripped with one hand the rudder handle, while with the other he twirled his mustache, that was continually quivering with smiles. Chelkash was pleased with his success, with himself, and with this youth, who had been so frightened of him and had been turned into his slave. He had a vision of unstinted dissipation to-morrow, while now he enjoyed the sense of his strength, which had enslaved this young, fresh lad. He watched how he was toiling, and felt sorry for him, wanted to encourage him.

"Eh!" he said softly, with a grin. "Were you awfully scared? eh?"

"Oh, no!" sighed Gavrilo, and he cleared his throat.

"But now you needn't work so at the oars. Ease off!

There's only one place now to pass. Rest a bit."

Gavrilo obediently paused, rubbed the sweat off his face with the sleeve of his shirt, and dropped the oars again into the water.

"Now, row more slowly, so that the water shouldn't bubble. We've only the gates to pass. Softly, softly. For they're serious people here, mate. They might take a pop at one in a minute. They'd give you such a bump on your forehead, you wouldn't have time to call out."

The boat now crept along over the water almost without a sound. Only from the oars dripped blue drops of water, and when they trickled into the sea, a blue patch of light was kindled for a minute where they fell. The night had become still warmer and more silent. The sky was no longer like a sea in turmoil, the clouds were spread out and covered it with a smooth, heavy canopy that hung low over the water and did not stir. And the sea was still more calm and black, and stronger than ever was the warm salt smell from it.

"Ah, if only it would rain!" whispered Chelkash. "We could get through then, behind a curtain as it were."

On the right and the left of the boat, like houses rising out of the black water, stood barges, black, motionless, and gloomy. On one of them moved a light; some one was walking up and down with a lantern. The sea stroked their sides with a hollow sound of supplication, and they responded with an echo, cold and resonant, as though unwilling to yield anything.

"The coastguards!" Chelkash whispered hardly above a breath.

From the moment when he had bidden him row more slowly, Gavrilo had again been overcome by that intense agony of expectation. He craned forward into the darkness, and he felt as though he were growing bigger; his bones and sinews were strained with a dull ache, his head, filled with a single idea, ached, the skin on his back twitched, and his legs seemed pricked with sharp, chill little pins and needles. His eyes ached from the strain of gazing into the darkness, whence he expected every instant something would spring up and shout to them: "Stop, thieves!"

Now when Chelkash whispered: "The coastguards!" Gavrilo shuddered, and one intense, burning idea passed through him, and thrilled his overstrained nerves; he longed to cry out, to call men to his aid. He opened his mouth, and half rose from his seat, squared his chest, drew in a full draught of breath--and opened his mouth--but suddenly,

struck down by a terror that smote him like a whip, he shut his eyes
and rolled forward off his seat.

Far away on the horizon, ahead of the boat, there rose up out
of the black water of the sea a huge fiery blue sword; it rose up,
cleaving the darkness of night, its blade glided through the clouds
in the sky, and lay, a broad blue streak on the bosom of the sea.
It lay there, and in the streak of its light there sprang up
out of the darkness ships unseen till then, black and mute,
shrouded in the thick night mist.

It seemed as though they had lain long at the bottom of the sea,
dragged down by the mighty hands of the tempest; and now behold
they had been drawn up by the power and at the will of this blue
fiery sword, born of the sea--had been drawn up to gaze upon
the sky and all that was above the water. Their rigging wrapped
about the masts and looked like clinging seaweeds, that had risen
from the depths with these black giants caught in their snares.
And it rose upward again from the sea, this strange blue sword,--
rose, cleft the night again, and again fell down in another direction.
And again, where it lay, there rose up out of the dark the outlines
of vessels, unseen before.

Chelkash's boat stopped and rocked on the water, as though
in uncertainty. Gavrilo lay at the bottom, his face hidden
in his hands, until Chelkash poked him with an oar and
whispered furiously, but softly:

"Fool, it's the customs cruiser. That's the electric light!
Get up, blockhead! Why, they'll turn the light on us in a minute!
You'll be the ruin of yourself and me! Come!"

And at last, when a blow from the sharp end of the oar struck
Gavrilo's head more violently, he jumped up, still afraid to open
his eyes, sat down on the seat, and, fumbling for the oars,
rowed the boat on.

"Quietly! I'll kill you! Didn't I tell you? There, quietly!
Ah, you fool, damn you! What are you frightened of? Eh, pig face?
A lantern and a reflector, that's all it is. Softly with the oars!
Mawkish devil! They turn the reflector this way and that way,
and light up the sea, so as to see if there are folks like you
and me afloat.

"To catch smugglers, they do it.They won't get us, they've sailed
too far off. Don't be frightened, lad, they won't catch us.
Now we--" Chelkash looked triumphantly round. "It's over,
we've rowed out of reach! Foo--o! Come, you're in luck."

Gavrilo sat mute; he rowed, and breathing hard,
looked askance where that fiery sword still rose and sank.
He was utterly unable to believe Chelkash that it was only
a lantern and a reflector. The cold, blue brilliance, that cut
through the darkness and made the sea gleam with silver light,
had something about it inexplicable, portentous, and Gavrilo
now sank into a sort of hypnotized, miserable terror.
Some vague presentiment weighed aching on his breast.
He rowed automatically, with pale face, huddled up as though
expecting a blow from above, and there was no thought,
no desire in him now, he was empty and soulless.
The emotions of that night had swallowed up at last all that
was human in him.

But Chelkash was triumphant again; complete success! all
anxiety at an end! His nerves, accustomed to strain, relaxed,
returned to the normal. His mustaches twitched voluptuously,
and there was an eager light in his eyes. He felt splendid,
whistled through his teeth, drew in deep breaths of the damp sea air,
looked about him in the darkness, and laughed good-naturedly
when his eyes rested on Gavrilo.

The wind blew up and waked the sea into a sudden play of fine ripples.
The clouds had become, as it were, finer and more transparent,
but the sky was still covered with them.

The wind, though still light, blew freely over the sea, yet the clouds
were motionless and seemed plunged in some gray, dreary dream.

"Come, mate, pull yourself together! it's high time!
Why, what a fellow you are; as though all the breath had been
knocked out of your skin, and only a bag of bones was left!
My dear fellow! It's all over now! Hey!"

It was pleasant to Gavrilo to hear a human voice, even though
Chelkash it was that spoke.

"I hear," he said softly.

"Come, then, milksop. Come, you sit at the rudder and I'll take the oars,
you must be tired!"

Mechanically Gavrilo changed places. When Chelkash, as he changed
places with him, glanced into his face, and noticed that he was
staggering on his shaking legs, he felt still sorrier for the lad.
He clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come, come, don't be scared! You've earned a good sum for it.
I'll pay you richly, mate. Would you like twenty-five roubles, eh?"

"I--don't want anything. Only to be on shore."

Chelkash waved his hand, spat, and fell to rowing, flinging the oars
far back with his long arms.

The sea had waked up. It frolicked in little waves, bringing them forth,
decking them with a fringe of foam, flinging them on one another,
and breaking them up into tiny eddies. The foam, melting, hissed and
sighed, and everything was filled with the musical plash and cadence.
The darkness seemed more alive.

"Come, tell me," began Chelkash, "you'll go home to the village,
and you'll marry and begin digging the earth and sowing corn,
your wife will bear you children, food won't be too plentiful,
and so you'll grind away all your life. Well? Is there such
sweetness in that?"

"Sweetness!" Gavrilo answered, timid and trembling, "what, indeed?"

The wind tore a rent in the clouds and through the gap peeped blue
bits of sky, with one or two stars. Reflected in the frolicking sea,
these stars danced on the waves, vanishing and shining out again.

"More to the right!" said Chelkash. "Soon we shall be there.
Well, well! It's over. A haul that's worth it! See here.
One night, and I've made five hundred roubles! Eh? What do you
say to that?"

"Five hundred?" Gavrilo, drawled, incredulously, but he was seared
at once, and quickly asked, prodding the bundle in the boat
with his foot. "Why, what sort of thing may this be?"

"That's silk. A costly thing. All that, if one sold it
for its value, would fetch a thousand. But I sell cheap.
Is that smart business?"

"I sa--ay?" Gavrilo drawled dubiously. "If only I'd all that!"
be sighed, recalling all at once the village, his poor little bit
of land, his poverty, his mother, and all that was so far away and
so near his heart; for the sake of which he bad gone to seek work,
for the sake of which he had suffered such agonies that night.
A flood of memories came back to him of his village, running down
the steep slope to the river and losing itself in a whole forest
of birch trees, willows, and mountain-ashes. These memories breathed
something warm into him and cheered him up. "Ah, it would be grand!"

he sighed mournfully.

"To be sure! I expect you'd bolt home by the railway!
And wouldn't the girls make love to you at home, aye, aye!
You could choose which you liked! You'd build yourself a house.
No, the money, maybe, would hardly be enough for a house."

"That's true--it wouldn't do for a house. Wood's dear down our way."

"Well, never mind. You'd mend up the old one. How about a horse?
Have you got one?"

"A horse? Yes, I have, but a wretched old thing it is."

"Well, then, you'd have a horse. A first-rate horse!
A cow--sheep--fowls of all sorts. Eh?"

"Don't talk of it! If I only could! Oh, Lord! What a life
I should have!"

"Aye, mate, your life would be first-rate. I know something
about such things. I had a home of my own once.
My father was one of the richest in the village."

Chelkash rowed slowly. The boat danced on the waves that sportively
splashed over its edge; it scarcely moved forward on the dark sea;
which frolicked more and more gayly. The two men were dreaming,
rocked on the water, and pensively looking around them.
Chelkash had turned Gavrilo's thoughts to his village with the aim
of encouraging and reassuring him.

At first he had talked grinning sceptically to himself under
his mustaches, but afterward, as he replied to his companion
and reminded him of the joys of a peasant's life, which he had
so long ago wearied of, had forgotten, and only now recalled,
he was gradually carried away, and, instead of questioning
the peasant youth about his village and its doings,
unconsciously he dropped into describing it himself:

"The great thing in the peasant's life, mate, is its freedom!
You're your own master. You've your own home--worth a farthing, maybe--
but it's yours! You've your own land--only a handful the whole of it--
but it's yours! Hens of your own, eggs, apples of your own!
You're king on your own land! And then the regularity.
You get up in the morning, you've work to do, in the spring
one sort, in the summer another, in the autumn, in the winter--
different again. Wherever you go, you've home to come back to!
It's snug! There's peace! You're a king! Aren't you really?"

Chelkash concluded enthusiastically his long reckoning of the peasant's advantages and privileges, forgetting, somehow, his duties.

Gavrilo looked at him with curiosity, and he, too, warmed to the subject. During this conversation he had succeeded in forgetting with whom he had to deal, and he saw in his companion a peasant like himself--cemented to the soil for ever by the sweat of generations, and bound to it by the recollections of childhood--who had wilfully broken loose from it and from its cares, and was bearing the inevitable punishment for this abandonment.

"That's true, brother! Ah, how true it is! Look at you, now, what you've become away from the land! Aha! The land, brother, is like a mother, you can't forget it for long."

Chelkash awaked from his reverie. He felt that scalding irritation in his chest, which always came as soon as his pride, the pride of the reckless vagrant, was touched by anyone, and especially by one who was of no value in his eyes.

"His tongue's set wagging!" he said savagely, "you thought, maybe, I said all that in earnest. Never fear!"

"But, you strange fellow!"--Gavrilo began, overawed again--
"Was I speaking of you? Why, there's lots like you!
Ah, what a lot of unlucky people among the people! Wanderers----"

"Take the oars, you sea-calf!" Chelkash commanded briefly, for some reason holding back a whole torrent of furious abuse, which surged up into his throat.

They changed places again, and Chelkash, as he crept across the boat to the stern, felt an intense desire to give Gavrilo a kick that would send him flying into the water, and at the same time could not pluck up courage to look him in the face.

The brief conversation dropped, but now Gavrilo's silence even was eloquent of the country to Chelkash.
He recalled the past, and forgot to steer the boat,
which was turned by the current and floated away out to sea.
The waves seemed to understand that this boat had missed its way,
and played lightly with it, tossing it higher and higher,
and kindling their gay blue light under its oars.
While before Chelkash's eyes floated pictures of the past,
the far past, separated from the present by the whole barrier
of eleven years of vagrant life.

He saw himself a child, his village, his mother, a red-cheeked

plump woman, with kindly gray eyes, his father, a red-bearded
giant with a stern face. He saw himself betrothed, and saw
his wife, black-eyed Anfisa, with her long hair, plump, mild,
and good-humored; again himself a handsome soldier in the Guards;
again his father, gray now and bent with toil, and his mother
wrinkled and bowed to the ground; he saw, too, the picture
of his welcome in the village when he returned from the service;
saw how proud his father was before all the village of his Grigory,
the mustached, stalwart soldier, so smart and handsome.
Memory, the scourge of the unhappy, gives life to the very stones
of the past, and even into the poison drunk in old days pours
drops of honey, so as to confound a man with his mistakes and,
by making him love the past, rob him of hope for the future.

Chelkash felt a rush of the softening, caressing air of home,
bringing back to him the tender words of his mother and the weighty
utterances of the venerable peasant, his father; many a forgotten
sound and many a lush smell of mother-earth, freshly thawing,
freshly ploughed, and freshly covered with the emerald silk of the corn.
And he felt crushed, lost, pitiful, and solitary, torn up and cast
out for ever from that life which had distilled the very blood
that flowed in his veins.

"Hey! but where are we going?" Gavrilo asked suddenly.

Chelkash started and looked round with the uneasy look of a bird of prey.

"Ah, the devil's taken the boat! No matter. Row a bit harder.
We'll be there directly."

"You were dreaming?" Gavrilo inquired, smiling.

Chelkash looked searchingly at him. The youth had completely regained
his composure; he was calm, cheerful and even seemed somehow triumphant.
He was very young, all his life lay before him. And he knew nothing.
That was bad. Maybe the earth would keep hold of him. As these
thoughts flashed through his head, Chelkash felt still more mournful,
and to Gavrilo he jerked out sullenly:

"I'm tired. And it rocks, too."

"It does rock, that's true. But now, I suppose, we shan't get
caught with this?" Gavrilo shoved the bale with his foot.

"No. You can be easy. I shall hand it over directly and get
the money. Oh, yes!"

"Five hundred?"

"Not less, I dare say."

"I say--that's a sum! If I, poor wretch, had that!
Ah, I'd have a fine time with it."

"On your land?"

"To be sure! Why, I'd be off----"

And Gravilo floated off into day dreams. Chelkash seemed crushed.
His mustaches drooped, his right side was soaked by the splashing
of the waves, his eyes looked sunken and had lost their brightness.
He was a pitiable and depressed figure. All that bird-of-prey look
in his figure seemed somehow eclipsed under a humiliated moodiness,
that showed itself in the very folds of his dirty shirt.

"I'm tired out, too--regularly done up."

"We'll be there directly. See over yonder."

Chelkash turned the boat sharply, and steered it toward something
black that stood up out of the water.

The sky was again all covered with clouds, and fine, warm rain
had come on, pattering gayly on the crests of the waves.

"Stop! easy!" commanded Chelkash.

The boat's nose knocked against the hull of the vessel.
"Are they asleep, the devils?" grumbled Chelkash, catching with
his boat-hook on to some ropes that hung over the ship's side.
"The ladder's not down. And this rain, too. As if it couldn't
have come before! Hi, you spongeos. Hi! Hi!"

"Is that Selkash?" they heard a soft purring voice say overhead.

"Come, let down the ladder."

"Kalimera, Selkash."

"Let down the ladder, you smutty devil!" yelled Chelkash.

"Ah, what a rage he's come in to-day. Ahoy!"

"Get up, Gavrilo!" Chelkash said to his companion.

In a moment they were on the deck, where three dark-bearded figures,

eagerly chattering together, in a strange staccato tongue looked over the side into Chelkash's boat. The fourth clad in a long gown, went up to him and pressed his hand without speaking, then looked suspiciously round at Gavrilo.

"Get the money ready for me by the morning," Chelkash said to him shortly. "And now I'll go to sleep. Gavrilo, come along! Are you hungry?"

"I'm sleepy," answered Gavrilo, and five minutes later he was snoring in the dirty hold of the vessel, while Chelkash, sitting beside him, tried on somebody's boots. Dreamily spitting on one side, he whistled angrily and mournfully between his teeth. Then he stretched himself out beside Gavrilo, and pulling the boots off his feet again and putting his arms under his head, he fell to gazing intently at the deck, and pulling his mustaches.

The vessel rocked softly on the frolicking water, there was a fretful creaking of wood somewhere, the rain pattered softly on the deck, and the waves splashed on the ship's side. Everything was melancholy and sounded like the lullaby of a mother, who has no hope of her child's happiness. And Chelkash fell asleep.

CHAPTER III

He was the first to wake, he looked round him uneasily, but at once regained his self-possession and stared at Gavrilo who was still asleep. He was sweetly snoring, and in his sleep smiled all over his childish, sun-burned healthy face. Chelkash sighed and climbed up the narrow rope-ladder. Through the port-hole he saw a leaden strip of sky. It was daylight, but a dreary autumn grayness.

Chelkash came back two hours later. His face was red, his mustaches were jauntily curled, a smile of good-humored gayety beamed on his lips. He was wearing a pair of stout high boots, a short jacket, and leather breeches, and he looked like a sportsman. His whole costume was worn, but strong and very becoming to him, making him look broader, covering up his angularity, and giving him a military air.

"Hi, little calf, get up!" He gave Gavrilo a kick.

Gavrilo started up, and, not recognizing him, stared at him in alarm with dull eyes. Chelkash chuckled.

"Well, you do look--" Gavrilo brought out with a broad grin at last. "You're quite a gentleman!"

"We soon change. But, I say, you're easily scared! aye!
How many times were you ready to die last night? eh? tell me!"

"Well, but just think, it's the first time I've ever been on such a job!
Why one may lose one's soul for all one's life!"

"Well, would you go again? Eh?"

"Again? Well--that--how can I say? For what inducement?
That's the point!"

"Well, if it were for two rainbows?"

"Two hundred roubles, you mean? Well--I might."

"But I say! What about your soul?"

"Oh, well--maybe one wouldn't lose it!" Gavrilo smiled.
"One mightn't--and it would make a man of one for all one's life."

Chelkash laughed good-humoredly.

"All right! that's enough joking. Let's row to land. Get ready!"

"Why, I've nothing to do! I'm ready."

And soon they were in the boat again, Chelkash at the rudder, Gavrilo at the oars. Above them the sky was gray, with clouds stretched evenly across it. The muddy green sea played with their boat, tossing it noisily on the waves that sportively flung bright salt drops into it. Far ahead from the boat's prow could be seen the yellow streak of the sandy shore, while from the stern there stretched away into the distance the free, gambolling sea, all furrowed over with racing flocks of billows, decked here and there with a narrow fringe of foam.

Far away they could see numbers of vessels, rocking on the bosom of the sea, away on the left a whole forest of masts and the white fronts of the houses of the town. From that direction there floated across the sea a dull resounding roar, that mingled with the splash of the waves into a full rich music. And over all was flung a delicate veil of ash-colored mist, that made things seem far from one another.

"Ah, there'll be a pretty dance by evening!" said Chelkash, nodding his head at the sea.

"A storm?" queried Gavrilo, working vigorously at the waves

with his oars. He was already wet through from head to foot
with the splashing the wind blew on him from the sea.

"Aye, aye!" Chelkash assented.

Gavrilo looked inquisitively at him, and his eyes expressed
unmistakable expectation of something.

"Well, how much did they give you?" he asked, at last,
seeing that Chelkash was not going to begin the conversation.

"Look!" said Chelkash, holding out to Gavrilo something he had pulled
out of his pocket.

Gavrilo saw the rainbow-colored notes and everything danced
in brilliant rainbow tints before his eyes.

"I say! Why, I thought you were bragging! That's--how much?"

"Five hundred and forty! A smart job!"

"Smart, yes!" muttered Gavrilo, with greedy eyes, watching the five
hundred and forty roubles as they were put back again in his pocket.
"Well, I never! What a lot of money!" and he sighed dejectedly.

"We'll have a jolly good spree, my lad!" Chelkash cried ecstatically.
"Eh, we've enough to. Never fear, mate, I'll give you your share.
I'll give you forty, eh? Satisfied? If you like, I'll give it you now!"

"If--you don't mind. Well? I wouldn't say no!"

Gavrilo was trembling all over with suspense and some other acute
feeling that dragged at his heart.

"Ha--ha--ha! Oh, you devil's doll! 'I'd not say no!'
Take it, mate, please! I beg you, indeed, take it!
I don't know what to do with such a lot of money!
You must help me out, take some, there!"

Chelkash held out some red notes to Gavrilo. He took them
with a shaking hand, let go the oars, and began stuffing
them away in his bosom, greedily screwing up his eyes
and drawing in his breath noisily, as though he had drunk
something hot. Chelkash watched him with an ironical smile.
Gavrilo took up the oars again and rowed nervously, hurriedly,
keeping his eyes down as though he were afraid of something.
His shoulders and his ears were twitching.

"You're greedy. That's bad. But, of course, you're a peasant,"
Chelkash said musingly.

"But see what one can do with money!" cried Gavrilo, suddenly breaking
into passionate excitement, and jerkily, hurriedly, as though
chasing his thoughts and catching his words as they flew, he began
to speak of life in the village with money and without money.
Respect, plenty, independence gladness!

Chelkash heard him attentively, with a serious face and eyes filled
with some dreamy thought. At times he smiled a smile of content.
"Here we are!" Chelkash cried at last, interrupting Gavrilo.

A wave caught up the boat and neatly drove it onto the sand.

"Come, mate, now it's over. We must drag the boat up farther,
so that it shouldn't get washed away. They'll come and fetch it.
Well, we must say good-bye! It's eight versts from here to the town.
What are you going to do? Coming back to the town, eh?"

Chelkash's face was radiant with a good-humoredly sly smile,
and altogether he had the air of a man who had thought of
something very pleasant for himself and a surprise to Gavrilo.
Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he rustled the notes there.

"No--I-- am not coming. I---" Gavrilo gasped, and seemed choking
with something. Within him there was raging a whole storm of desires,
of words, of feelings, that swallowed up one another and scorched him
as with fire.

Chelkash looked at him in perplexity.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Why----" But Gavrilo's face flushed, then turned gray,
and he moved irresolutely, as though he were half longing
to throw himself on Chelkash, or half torn by some desire,
the attainment of which was hard for him.

Chelkash felt ill at ease at the sight of such excitement in this lad.
He wondered what form it would take.

Gavrilo began laughing strangely, a laugh that was like a sob.
His head was downcast, the expression of his face Chelkash could
not see; Gavrilo's ears only were dimly visible, and they turned
red and then pale.

"Well, damn you!" Chelkash waved his hand, "Have you fallen

in love with me, or what? One might think you were a girl!
Or is parting from me so upsetting? Hey, suckling! Tell me,
what's wrong? or else I'm off!"

"You're going!" Gavrilo cried aloud.

The sandy waste of the shore seemed to start at his cry, and the
yellow ridges of sand washed by the sea-waves seemed quivering.
Chelkash started too. All at once Gavrilo tore himself
from where he stood, flung himself at Chelkash's feet,
threw his arms round them, and drew them toward him.
Chelkash staggered; he sat heavily down on the sand, and grinding
his teeth, brandished his long arm and clenched fist in the air.
But before he had time to strike he was pulled up by Gavrilo's
shame-faced and supplicating whisper:

"Friend! Give me--that money! Give it me, for Christ's sake!
What is it to you? Why in one night--in only one night--
while it would take me a year--Give it me--I will pray for you!
Continually--in three churches--for the salvation of your soul!
Why you'd cast it to the winds--while I'd put it into the land.
O, give it me! Why, what does it mean to you? Did it cost
you much? One night--and you're rich! Do a deed of mercy!
You're a lost man, you see--you couldn't make your way--
while I--oh, give it to me!"

Chelkash, dismayed, amazed, and wrathful, sat on the sand,
thrown backward with his hands supporting him; he sat there in silence,
rolling his eyes frightfully at the young peasant, who, ducking his
head down at his knees, whispered his prayer to him in gasps.
He shoved him away at last, jumped up to his feet, and thrusting
his hands into his pockets, flung the rainbow notes at Gavrilo.

"There, cur! Swallow them!" he roared, shaking with excitement,
with intense pity and hatred of this greedy slave.
And as he flung him the money, he felt himself a hero.
There was a reckless gleam in his eyes, an heroic air about
his whole person.

"I'd meant to give you more, of myself. I felt sorry for you yesterday.
I thought of the village. I thought: come, I'll help the lad.
I was waiting to see what you'd do, whether you'd beg or not.
While you!--Ah, you rag! you beggar! To be able to torment oneself so--
for money! You fool. Greedy devils! They're beside themselves--
sell themselves for five kopecks! eh?"

"Dear friend! Christ have mercy on you! Why, what have I now!
thousands!! I'm a rich man!" Gavrilo shrilled in ecstasy,

all trembling, as he stowed away the notes in his bosom.
"Ah, you good man! Never will I forget you! Never! And my
wife and my children--I'll bid them pray for you!"

Chelkash listened to his shrieks and wails of ecstasy, looked at his
radiant face that was contorted by greedy joy, and felt that he,
thief and rake as he was, cast out from everything in life,
would never be so covetous, so base, would never so forget himself.
Never would he be like that! And this thought and feeling,
filling him with a sense of his own independence and reckless daring,
kept him beside Gavrilo on the desolate sea shore.

"You've made me happy!" shrieked Gavrilo, and snatching Chelkash's hand,
he pressed it to his face.

Chelkash did not speak; he grinned like a wolf.
Gavrilo still went on pouring out his heart:

"Do you know what I was thinking about? As we rowed here--
I saw--the money--thinks I--I'll give it him--you--with the oar--
one blow! the money's mine, and into the sea with him--you,
that is--eh! Who'll miss him? said I. And if they do find him,
they won't be inquisitive how--and who it was killed him.
He's not a man, thinks I, that there'd be much fuss about!
He's of no use in the world! Who'd stand up for him?
No, indeed--eh?"

"Give the money here!" growled Chelkash, clutching Gavrilo
by the throat.

Gavrilo struggled away once, twice. Chelkash's other arm twisted
like a snake about him--there was the sound of a shirt tearing--
and Gavrilo lay on the sand, with his eyes staring wildly,
his fingers clutching at the air and his legs waving.
Chelkash, erect, frigid, rapacious--looking, grinned maliciously,
laughed a broken, biting laugh, and his mustaches twitched
nervously in his sharp, angular face.

Never in all his life had he been so cruelly wounded,
and never had he felt so vindictive.

"Well, are you happy now?" he asked Gavrilo through his laughter,
and turning his back on him he walked away in the direction of the town.
But he had hardly taken two steps when Gavrilo, crouched like a cat
on one knee, and with a wide sweep of his arm, flung a round stone
at him, viciously, shouting:

"O--one!"

Chelkash uttered a cry, clapped his hands to the nape of his neck, staggered forward, turned round to Gavrilo, and fell on his face on the sand. Gavrilo's heart failed him as he watched him. He saw him stir one leg, try to lift his head, and then stretch out, quivering like a bowstring. Then Gavrilo rushed fleeing away into the distance, where a shaggy black cloud hung over the foggy steppe, and it was dark. The waves whispered, racing up the sand, melting into it and racing back. The foam hissed and the spray floated in the air.

It began to rain, at first slightly, but soon a steady, heavy downpour was falling in streams from the sky, weaving a regular network of fine threads of water that at once hid the steppe and the sea. Gavrilo vanished behind it. For a long while nothing was to be seen but the rain and the long figure of the man stretched on the sand by the sea. But suddenly Gavrilo ran back out of the rain. Like a bird he flew up to Chelkash, dropped down beside him, and began to turn him over on the ground. His hand dipped into a warm, red stickiness. He shuddered and staggered back with a face pale and distraught.

"Brother, get up!" he whispered through the patter of the lain into Chelkash's ear.

Revived by the water on his face, Chelkash came to himself, and pushed Gavrilo away, saying hoarsely:

"Get--away!"

"Brother! Forgive me--it was the devil tempted me," Gavrilo whispered, faltering, as he kissed Chelkash's band.

"Go along. Get away!" he croaked.

"Take the sin from off my soul! Brother! Forgive me!"

"For--go away, do! Go to the devil!" Chelkash screamed suddenly, and he sat up on the sand. His face was pale and angry, his eyes were glazed, and kept closing, as though he were very sleepy. "What more--do you want? You've done--your job--and go away! Be off!" And he tried to kick Gavrilo away, as he knelt, overwhelmed, beside him, but he could not, and would have rolled over again if Gavrilo had not held him up, putting his arms round his shoulders. Chelkash's face was now on a level with Gavrilo's. Both were pale, piteous, and terrible-looking.

"Tfoo!" Chelkash spat into the wide, open eyes of his companion.

Meekly Gavrilo wiped his face with his sleeve, and murmured:

"Do as you will. I won't say a word. For Christ's sake, forgive me!"

"Snivelling idiot! Even stealing's more than you can do!"
Chelkash cried scornfully, tearing a piece of his shirt under
his jacket, and without a word, clenching his teeth now and then,
he began binding up his head. "Did you take the notes?"
he filtered through his teeth.

"I didn't touch them, brother! I didn't want them! there's
ill-luck from them!"

Chelkash thrust his hand into his jacket pocket, drew out a bundle
of notes, put one rainbow-colored note back in his pocket,
and handed all the rest to Gavrilo.

"Take them and go!"

"I won't take them, brother. I can't! Forgive me!"

"T-take them, I say!" bellowed Chelkash, glaring horribly.

"Forgive me! Then I'll take them," said Gavrilo, timidly, and he fell
at Chelkash's feet on the damp sand, that was being liberally drenched
by the rain.

"You lie, you'll take them, sniveller!" Chelkash said with conviction,
and with an effort, pulling Gavrilo's head up by the hair, he thrust
the notes in his face.

"Take them! take them! You didn't do your job for nothing, I suppose.
Take it, don't be frightened! Don't be ashamed of having nearly
killed a man! For people like me, no one will make much inquiry.
They'll say thank you, indeed, when they know of it. There, take it!
No one will ever know what you've done, and it deserves a reward.
Come, now!"

Gavrilo saw that Chelkash was laughing, and he felt relieved.
He crushed the notes up tight in his hand.

"Brother! You forgive me? Won't you? Eh?" he asked tearfully.

"Brother of mine!" Chelkash mimicked him as he got, reeling,
on to his legs. "What for? There's nothing to forgive.
To-day you do for me, to-morrow I'll do for you."

"Oh, brother, brother!" Gavrilo sighed mournfully, shaking his head.

Chelkash stood facing him, he smiled strangely, and the rag on his head, growing gradually redder, began to look like a Turkish fez.

The rain streamed in bucketsful. The sea moaned with a hollow sound, and the waves beat on the shore, lashing furiously and wrathfully against it.

The two men were silent.

"Come, good-bye!" Chelkash said, coldly and sarcastically.

He reeled, his legs shook, and he held his head queerly, as though he were afraid of losing it.

"Forgive me, brother!" Gavrilo besought him once more.

"All right!" Chelkash answered, coldly, setting off on his way.

He walked away, staggering, and still holding his head in his left hand, while he slowly tugged at his brown mustache with the right.

Gavrilo looked after him a long while, till the had disappeared in the rain, which still poured down in fine, countless streams, and wrapped everything in an impenetrable steel-gray mist.

Then Gavrilo took off his soaked cap, made the sign of the cross, looked at the notes crushed up in his hand, heaved a deep sigh of relief, thrust them into his bosom, and with long, firm strides went along the shore, in the opposite direction from that Chelkash had taken.

The sea howled, flinging heavy, breaking billows on the sand of the shore, and dashing them into spray, the rain lashed the water and the earth, the wind blustered. All the air was full of roaring, howling, moaning. Neither distance nor sky could be seen through the rain.

Soon the rain and the spray had washed away the red patch on the spot where Chelkash had lain, washed away the traces of Chelkash and the peasant lad on the sandy beach. And no trace was left on the seashore of the little drama that had been played out between two men.



DIES IRAE.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *When the King Loses His Head and Other Stories*, by Leonid Andreyev

CHANT THE FIRST.

1.

This free song of the stern days of justice and retribution I have composed myself, as well as I could, I, Geronimo Pascagna, a Sicilian bandit, murderer, highwayman, criminal.

Having composed it to the best of my ability, I meant to sing it loudly, as good songs should be sung, but my jailer would not allow it. My jailer's ear is overgrown with hair; it has a strait and a narrow channel: fit for words that are untruthful, sly, words that can crawl upon their bellies like reptiles. But my words walk erect, they have deep chests, broad backs--ah, how painfully they tore at the tender ear of the jailer which was overgrown with hair!

"If the ear is shut, seek another entrance, Geronimo," I said to myself amicably; and I pondered, and I sought, and finally I succeeded and found it, for Geronimo is no fool, let me tell you. And this is what I found: I found a stone. And this is what I did: I chiseled my song into the stone, and with the blows of my wrath I set aflame its icy heart. And when the stone came to life and glanced at me with the fiery eyes of wrath, I cautiously took it away and placed it at the very edge of the prison wall.

Can you not see what I have in mind? I am wise, I figure that a friendly quake will soon again set the earth aquiver, and once again it will destroy your city; and the walls will crumble, and my stone will drop and shatter the jailer's head. And having shattered it, it will leave upon his soft waxy blood-grey brain the impress of my song of freedom, like the seal of a king, like a new commandment of wrath--and thus will the jailer go down to his grave.

I say, jailer, shut not your ear, for I shall enter through your skull!

2.

If I am then alive, I shall laugh with joy; and if I chance to be dead, my bones shall dance in their insecure grave. That will be a merry Tarantella!

Can you say upon your oath that such things can never be? The same quake might cast me back upon the face of the earth: my rotting coffin, my decayed flesh, my whole body, dead and buried for keeps, tightly clamped down. For such things have happened upon great days: the earth opening up about the cemeteries, the still coffins crawling out into the light.

Those still coffins, uninvited guests at the banquet!

3.

These be the names of the comrades with whom I made friends in those fleeting hours: Pascale, a professor; Giuseppe, Pincio, Alba. They were shot by firing squads. There was also another one, young, obliging, and so handsome. It was a pity to look at him. I esteemed him as a son, he reverenced me as a father, but I did not know his name. I had not chanced to ask him, or perhaps I have forgotten it. He, too, was shot by the soldiers. There may have been one or two more, also friends, I do not remember them. When the youngster was being put to death, I did not run far away, I hid right here, back of the wall--now crumbled--near the trampled cactus. I saw and heard everything. And when I started to leave, the trampled cactus pierced me with its thorn. Was it not planted near the wall to keep away the thieves? How faithful are the servants of the rich!

4.

The firing squad put them to death. Remember the names which I have mentioned; and with regard to those whom I have not mentioned by name, remember merely that they were put to death. But don't go and make a sign of the cross upon your brow, or worse than that--don't go and order a requiem mass--they did not like such things. Honor the dead with the silence of truth, and if you must lie, lie in some merrier fashion, but never by saying mass: they did not like that.

5.

That first quake that destroyed the prison and the city had a voice of rare power and of queer, superhuman dignity: it roared from below, from beneath the ground, it was vast and hoarse and menacing; and everything shook and crumbled. And ere I grasped what was going on, I knew that all was over, that it was perhaps the end of the earth. But I was not particularly frightened: why should I be especially frightened even if it were the end of the world? Long did he roar, that deaf subterranean trumpeter.

And all at once politely opened the door.

6.

I had sat a long time in prison, without hope. I had tried to flee and failed. Nor could you have managed to escape, for that accursed prison was very well built.

And I had become accustomed to the iron of the bars and to the stone of the walls, and they seemed to me eternal, and he who had built them the strongest in the world. And it was no use to think whether he was just or not, so strong and eternal he was. Even in my dreams I saw no freedom--I did not believe, expect or feel it. And I feared to call it. It is perilous to call freedom; while you keep still, you may live; but call freedom once, ever so softly, you must either gain it or die. This is true, so said Pascale, the professor.

And thus without hope I sat in prison, and suddenly opened the door. Politely and of its own accord. At any rate it was no human hand that opened it.

7.

The streets were in ruins, in a terrible chaos. All the material of which people build was resolved to its elements and lay as it had been in the beginning. The houses were crumbling, bursting, reeling like drunken, squatting down upon the ground, on their own crushed legs. Others were sulkily casting themselves down upon the ground, with their heads upon the pavement--crash! And opened were the little boxes in which human beings live--pretty little boxes, all plastered with paper. The pictures still hung on the walls, but the people were no more; they had been thrown out, they were lying beneath masses of stone. And the earth was twitching convulsively--for, you must know that the

subterranean trumpeter had started to roar again, that deaf devil who can never have enough noise because he is so deaf. Sweet, painstaking, gigantic devil!

But I was free and I did not understand it yet. I hesitated to walk away from that accursed prison. I was standing there, blinking stupidly at the ruins. And the comrades had also assembled, none attempting to leave, crowding distractedly, like the children about the figure of a dissipated, drunken mother that had fallen to the ground. A fine mother, indeed!

Suddenly Pascale, the professor, said:

"Look!"

One of the walls which we had deemed eternal had burst in two; and the window, with its iron bars, had split in two as well. The iron was twisted and torn like a rotten rag--think of it, the iron! In my hands it had not even rattled, it had pretended to be eternal, the most powerful thing on earth, and now it was not worth to be spat upon,--the iron, think of it!

Then I, and the rest of us, understood that we were free.

8.

Free!

9.

It is harder for you to bend a grass blade than for him to bend three iron rails one atop the other. Three or a hundred, it is all the same to him. It is more difficult for you to raise a cup of water to your lips than for him to raise a sea of water, to shake it up, to lift the dregs thereof and to cast them out upon the shore; to bring the cold to boiling. It is harder for you to gnaw through a piece of sugar than for him to gnaw through a mountain. It is more difficult for you to tear a thin and rotting thread than for him to break three wire ropes twisted into one braid. You will perspire and flush with exertion before you manage to stir up an anthill with your stick--and he with one push destroys your city. He has picked up an iron steamship as you with your hand pick up a tiny pebble, and has cast it ashore--have you ever seen the like of such strength?

10.

All that had been open he has shut; the door of your house has grown into its walls, and together they have choked you: your door, your walls, your ceiling. And he likewise has opened the doors of the prison which you had shut so carefully.

You, rich man, whom I hate!

11.

If I gather from all over the world all the good words which people use, all the tender sayings, all the ringing songs and fling them all into the joyous air;

If I gather all the smiles of children, the laughter of women whom none has yet wronged, the caresses of greyhaired mothers, the faithful handshakes of a friend--and weave of them all an incorruptible wreath for some one beautiful head;

If I pass over the face of the earth and garner all the flowers that grow upon it: in the forests and in the fields, in the meadows and in the gardens of the rich, in the depths of the waters, upon the azure bottom of the ocean; if I gather all the precious sparkling stones, bringing them forth out of hidden crevices, out of the gloomy depths of mines, tearing them from the crowns of kings and from the ears of the rich--and pile them all, the stones and the flowers, into one radiant mountain;

If I gather all the fires that burn in the universe, all the lights, all the rays, all the flashes, flares and silent glows, and in the glare of one mighty conflagration illumine the quaking worlds;

Even then I shall be unable to name thee, to crown thee, to laud thee--O Freedom!

12.

Freedom!

13.

Over my head was the sky, and the sky is always free, always open to the winds and to the movement of the clouds; under my feet was the road, and the road is always free; it was made to walk on, it was made for the feet to move over its surface, going back and forth, leaving one spot and finding another. The road is the sweetheart of him who is free; you have to kiss it on meeting, to weep over it on parting.

And when my feet began to move upon the road, I thought that a miracle had occurred. I looked, and Pascale's feet were also moving, the professor! I looked, and the youngster was also moving with youthful feet, hurrying, stumbling, and suddenly he ran.

"Whither?"

But Pascale sternly reproved me.

"Don't throw questions at him; you'll break his limbs. For you and I are old, Geronimo."

And we wept. And suddenly the deaf trumpeter roared out anew.

CHANT THE SECOND.

1.

A long time we walked about the city and saw much that was striking, strange and sinister.

2.

Neither can you shut in the fire--I was saying this, I, Geronimo Pascagna. If you would be at peace, put it out altogether, but do not lock it up in stone, in iron or in glass; it will escape, and your strongly built house will come to a bad end. When your mighty house is fallen, and your life is extinct, it alone will burn, retaining the heat and the blazing ruddiness and all the force of the flame. It may lie awhile on the ground, it may pretend even to be dead; then it will lift its head upon a slender neck and look about--to the right and to the left, forward and backward. And it will leap. And it will hide again, and will look again, it will straighten up, throw back its head,

and suddenly it will grow terribly stout.

And it will no longer have one head upon one slender neck: it will have thousands. And it will no longer crawl slowly, it will run, it will make gigantic bounds. It had been silent, now it is singing, whistling, yelling, giving orders to stone and to iron, driving all from its path.

And suddenly it will begin to circle.

3.

We saw more dead people than living; and the dead were calm; they did not know what had happened to them, and they were calm. But what about the living? Just think what a ridiculous thing was told us by a madman for whom, too, in those days of stern equality the door had opened!

Do you think he was amazed? He looked on attentively and benignly, and the grey stubble on his yellow face bristled with proud joy--as though he had done it all himself. I do not like madmen, and was going to walk past him, but Pascale, the professor, stopped me, and respectfully asked the proud madman:

"What makes you so pleased, signor?"

Pascale was far from being short of stature, but the madman searched for him a long time with his eyes, like for a grain of sand that has suddenly spoken out aloud from amidst of a sand heap, and finally he discovered him. And hardly parting his lips--so proud was he--he repeated the question:

"What makes me so pleased?"

And he waved his hand majestically and said:

"This is perfect order. We have so long craved for order."

He called that order! I laughed out aloud, but just at that moment a corpulent and altogether insane monk came up, and proved even more ridiculous.

4.

For a long time they played their comedy among the ruins, the lunatic and the monk, while we sat on a heap of stones, laughing and

encouraging them, shouting "bravo."

"Fraud! I have been deceived!" cried the fat monk.

He was so fat, I don't think you've ever seen any one as fat. It was repulsive to watch him, the yellow fat of his cheeks and of his belly quivered and shook so with wrath and fear.

"There's perfect order for you!" cried the lunatic approvingly, hardly deigning to part his lips.

"Fraud!" yelled the monk.

And suddenly he commenced to curse God. The monk! Think of it!

5.

/$
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.....
$/

6.

He assured us all that God had deceived him and he wept. He swore like a crooked gambler that this was poor recompense for his prayers and his faith. He stamped his feet and he cursed like a mule driver who comes out of a gin mill and suddenly discovers that his mules had scattered to the four winds.

And suddenly Pascale, the professor, lost his temper. He demanded that I give him my knife and said to the monk who had sat down for a rest after his outburst of curses:

"Listen, in a minute I will slit your belly, and if I find there but one drop of wine or one atom of a pullet...."

"And if you don't?" angrily retorted the monk.

"Then we shall count you among the saints. Hold his legs, Geronimo!"

The monk was frightened and departed mumbling:

"And I thought you were Christians! Blasphemy! Blasphemy!"

But the lunatic gazed after him benignly and spoke approvingly:

"This is what I call perfect order. We have been so long waiting for perfect order."

7.

And we walked a long time about the city and saw many odd things. But the day was short, and the night fell upon earth earlier than ever before; and when the firing squad was killing Pascale, the soldiers had lighted their torches.

8.

When Pascale was put against the wall, against the portion of it which had remained uninjured, and the soldiers raised their rifles, the officer said to him:

"You will die in a moment. Tell me why are you not afraid? That which has happened is terrible, and we are all pale with horror, but you are not. Why is that?" Pascale was silent; he waited for the officer to ask him more questions so that he might reply to all of them in one.

"And whence comes your boldness: to stoop and to take that which belongs to others at a time when people in terror forget even themselves and their children? And are you not sorry for those women and children who have perished? We have seen cats that have lost their mind through terror, and you are a human being. I will have you shot instantly."

This was well spoken, but our Pascale could speak every bit as well. He has been shot dead. He is dead, but some day when all the dead arise you will hear his speech, and you will shed tears, if by that time all the tears are not exhausted, O Man.

He said:

"I take that which is another's because I have Nothing that is my own. I took the raiment off a dead man in order to clothe my living flesh, but you have seen me do it, and so you have stripped me; and now I stand naked in front of your rifles. Soldiers, fire!"

But the officer did not suffer them to fire and asked him to speak

further.

9.

"Naked I stand in front of your rifles and fear nothing, not even your rifles. But you are pale with fear, and you fear everything, even your own rifles, even my naked body. When the quake was heard, it destroyed and killed your city, your fortunes, your children and wives--but it opened a prison for me. What then shall I fear? I have nothing of my own upon the face of the earth. I am, naked.

10.

"And if the whole earth crumbled into ruin, and the very beasts howled with horror, and the fish found a voice to express their grief, and the birds fell to the ground with dread, even then I would not fear. For all others it means the ruin of the earth, for me it opens the doors of a prison. What then shall I fear? I am naked.

11.

"And if the universe crumbled, with heaven and hell, and horror were enthroned over the infinity of living creatures, even then I would know no fear. For all it would be the end of the universe, for me the opening of a prison. What then shall I fear? I am naked.

12.

"And now, when with one salvo of your rifles you will destroy for me the earth and the universe, even now I know no fear. For all of you it will be the destruction and the fall of a human body, but for me a prison will open its gates. Soldiers, fire! I am naked."

13.

The torches blazed. It was the shortest day which I had ever seen. Night fell upon the earth more quickly than ever before.

"It is your turn now," ordered the officer, when Pascale, the professor, had fallen.

True, I had not been caught in any wrongdoing, and there was nothing to kill me for. But can you argue with them? And so I stood up. And I lamented the night. Do you understand me? the night! Here the torches and the fires were ruining it, and there, behind the torches and the fire, it stood out strong, and firm, and dark as the nights of my youth. I love the night, for then I do not see myself and can think what I will. The day reaches my garments, but can go no further. It stops at the darkness of my body and turns blind. But the night reaches my very heart. That is why it is so easy to love at night; anybody will tell you that. Ah, to spend only one hour in the shade of the faithful, of the black and beautiful night, only one hour. But can you argue with them? So I stood up.

But it is well to love also in the day time, when the sun is shining. Love itself is like the night, it reaches the heart, don't you see. And in love you fail to see your own self, even as in the midst of night. And if you only look into its eyes--straight into its black eyes--and look without tearing your gaze away....

Suddenly for some reason the officer shouted angrily at the soldier and snapped at me:

"Get out of here!"

14.

Another day passed. And on that day the soldiers shot that youngster who had called me father.

15.

Night sank upon the earth and I departed from that city of the dead.

16.

Dies irae--the day of wrath, the day of vengeance and of stem retribution, the day of Horror and of Death.

17.

That procession which I had watched from behind the wall was a strange and a terrible sight. They were bearing the statues of their saints, but did not know whether to raise them still higher over their heads or to cast them upon the ground, trampling the fragments underfoot. Some were still cursing, while others were already saying their prayers, but they walked on together, the children of the same father and the same mother, or Horror and of Death. They leaped over the crevices and disappeared in abysses. And the saints reeled like drunkards.

Dies irae.... Some were singing, others were weeping, and still others were laughing. Some howled like lunatics. And they were waving their hands, and all were in a hurry. The fat-bellied monks were running. From whom were they running away? Not a soul was seen behind them. Meekly lolled the ruins in the warm glow of the sun, and the fire was disappearing into the ground, smoking wearily.

18.

From whom were they fleeing? There was not a soul behind them.

19.

You barely touched a tree, and a ripe orange fell at your feet. First one, then another, a third.... The crop bids fair to be fine. A good orange is like a little sun, and when there is an abundance of them, you feel like smiling, as though the sun shone brightly. And the leaves are so dark, just like the night back of the sun. No, they are green, dark green. Why are you telling untruths, Geronimo?

But how cautious is that deaf devil, that subterranean trumpeter, who is never content because of his deafness: he has destroyed a city, but has left an orange suspended on a branch, to wait for Geronimo. You barely touch the tree, and a ripe orange drops at your feet. First one, then another, then a third.... They will be taken overseas to strange lands. And in those lands, where reign the cold and the fogs, people will look at them and say: "Yes, there is a sun for you!"

20.

Pascale, the professor,--we called him _"il professore"_ because he was so wise, he could write verses, and he discoursed so nobly on all sorts of subjects. He is dead.

21.

Why am I terrified? Why do I walk faster and faster? I had been afraid there....

22.

I never knew that my feet so loved to walk. They love every step which they make. They part so sadly with every step; they seem to want to turn back. And so greedy are they that the longest road seems short to them, that the widest road seems narrow. They regret--fancy!--that they cannot at once walk backward and forward, to the right and to the left. Let them have their will and they will cover the earth with their traces, not leaving a patch: and still they would seek more.

And another thing I did not know: I did not know about my eyes that they can breathe.

Afar off I see the ocean.

23.

What else can I tell you? I was seized by the gendarmes.

24.

Once more thou hast locked the doors of my prison, O Man! When didst thou have time to build it? Still in ruins lies thy house, the bones of thy children are not yet bare in the grave, but thou art already at work, tapping with thy hammer, patching together with cement the obedient stone, rearing before thy face the obedient iron. How fast dost thou build thy prisons, O Man!

Still in ruins are thy churches, bu thy prison is all finished.

Still shaking with terror are thy hands, but already they grasp the key, and rattle the lock, and slip the bolt. Thou art a musician: to the jingle of gold thou requirest the accompanying rattle of fetters--let that be the bass.

Grim death is still in thy blanched nostrils, and already thou art sniffing at something, turning thy nose this way and that way. How fast buildest thou thy prisons, O Man!

25.

The iron does not even rattle--so strong it is. And it is cold to the touch like someone's icy heart. Silent is also the stone of the walls--so proud it is, so everlasting and mighty. At the appointed time comes the jailer and flings at me my food like at a savage beast. And I show my teeth--why should I not show my teeth? I am starved and naked. And the clock is striking.

Art thou content, O Man, my master?

26.

But I do not believe in thy prison, O Man, my master!

I do not believe in thy iron; I do not believe in thy stone, in thy power, O Man, my master! That which I have once seen destroyed, shall never be knit together again.

Thus would have spoken even Pascale, the professor.

27.

Set thy clock a-going, it marks well the time until it stops. Rattle thy keys, for even thy paradise thou hast shut with lock and key. Rattle thy keys and shut the door, they shut well while there is a door. And walk around cautiously.

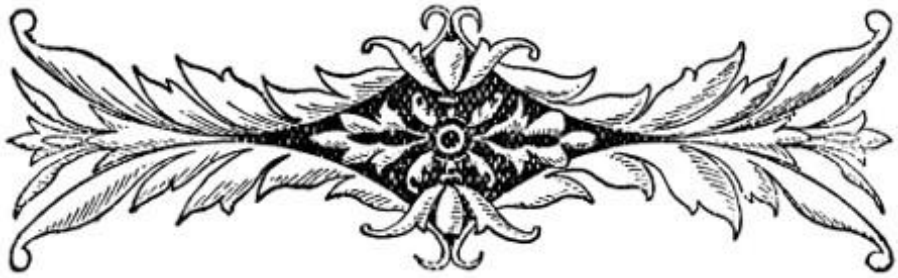
And when all is still, thou wilt say: it is well now, it is quite still now. And thou wilt lie down to sleep. It is quite still now, thou wilt say, but I hear how he is gnawing at the iron with his teeth. But thou wilt say that the iron is too strong for him, and thou wilt lie down to sleep. And when thou hast fallen asleep, holding tight thy keys in thy

happy hands, suddenly the subterranean trumpeter will roar out loudly, awaking thee with his thunder, raising thee to thy feet with the force of terror, holding thee erect with a mighty arm: so that dying thou shalt see death. Wide as the day will open thy eyes; terror will tear them wide open. Ears will come to thy heart, so that dying thou shalt hear death.

And thy clock will stop.

28.

Freedom!



HOW THE TWO IVANS QUARRELLED

Project Gutenberg's *Taras Bulba and Other Tales*, by Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol

CHAPTER I

IVAN IVANOVITCH AND IVAN NIKIFOROVITCH

A fine pelisse has Ivan Ivanovitch! splendid! And what lambskin! deuce take it, what lambskin! blue-black with silver lights. I'll forfeit, I know not what, if you find any one else owning such a one. Look at it, for heaven's sake, especially when he stands talking with any one! look at him side-ways: what a pleasure it is! To describe it is impossible: velvet! silver! fire! Nikolai the Wonder-worker, saint of God! why have I not such a pelisse? He had it made before Agafya Fedosyevna went to Kief. You know Agafya Fedosyevna who bit the assessor's ear off?

Ivan Ivanovitch is a very handsome man. What a house he has in Mirgorod! Around it on every side is a balcony on oaken pillars, and on the balcony are benches. Ivan Ivanovitch, when the weather gets too warm, throws off his pelisse and his remaining upper garments, and sits, in

his shirt sleeves, on the balcony to observe what is going on in the courtyard and the street. What apples and pears he has under his very windows! You have but to open the window and the branches force themselves through into the room. All this is in front of the house; but you should see what he has in the garden. What is there not there? Plums, cherries, every sort of vegetable, sunflowers, cucumbers, melons, peas, a threshing-floor, and even a forge.

A very fine man, Ivan Ivanovitch! He is very fond of melons: they are his favourite food. As soon as he has dined, and come out on his balcony, in his shirt sleeves, he orders Gapka to bring two melons, and immediately cuts them himself, collects the seeds in a paper, and begins to eat. Then he orders Gapka to fetch the ink-bottle, and, with his own hand, writes this inscription on the paper of seeds: "These melons were eaten on such and such a date." If there was a guest present, then it reads, "Such and such a person assisted."

The late judge of Mirgorod always gazed at Ivan Ivanovitch's house with pleasure. The little house is very pretty. It pleases me because sheds and other little additions are built on to it on all sides; so that, looking at it from a distance, only roofs are visible, rising one above another, and greatly resembling a plate full of pancakes, or, better still, fungi growing on the trunk of a tree. Moreover, the roof is all overgrown with weeds: a willow, an oak, and two apple-trees lean their spreading branches against it. Through the trees peep little windows with carved and white-washed shutters, which project even into the street.

A very fine man, Ivan Ivanovitch! The commissioner of Poltava knows him too. Dorosh Tarasovitch Pukhivotchka, when he leaves Khorola, always goes to his house. And when Father Peter, the Protopope who lives at Koliberdas, invites a few guests, he always says that he knows of no one who so well fulfils all his Christian duties and understands so well how to live as Ivan Ivanovitch.

How time flies! More than ten years have already passed since he became a widower. He never had any children. Gapka has children and they run about the court-yard. Ivan Ivanovitch always gives each of them a cake, or a slice of melon, or a pear.

Gapka carries the keys of the storerooms and cellars; but the key of the large chest which stands in his bedroom, and that of the centre storeroom, Ivan Ivanovitch keeps himself; Gapka is a healthy girl, with ruddy cheeks and calves, and goes about in coarse cloth garments.

And what a pious man is Ivan Ivanovitch! Every Sunday he dons his pelisse and goes to church. On entering, he bows on all sides, generally stations himself in the choir, and sings a very good bass. When the

service is over, Ivan Ivanovitch cannot refrain from passing the poor people in review. He probably would not have cared to undertake this tiresome work if his natural goodness had not urged him to it. "Good-day, beggar!" he generally said, selecting the most crippled old woman, in the most patched and threadbare garments. "Whence come you, my poor woman?"

"I come from the farm, sir. 'Tis two days since I have eaten or drunk: my own children drove me out."

"Poor soul! why did you come hither?"

"To beg alms, sir, to see whether some one will not give me at least enough for bread."

"Hm! so you want bread?" Ivan Ivanovitch generally inquired.

"How should it be otherwise? I am as hungry as a dog."

"Hm!" replied Ivan Ivanovitch usually, "and perhaps you would like butter too?"

"Yes; everything which your kindness will give; I will be content with all."

"Hm! Is butter better than bread?"

"How is a hungry person to choose? Anything you please, all is good." Thereupon the old woman generally extended her hand.

"Well, go with God's blessing," said Ivan Ivanovitch. "Why do you stand there? I'm not beating you." And turning to a second and a third with the same questions, he finally returns home, or goes to drink a little glass of vodka with his neighbour, Ivan Nikiforovitch, or the judge, or the chief of police.

Ivan Ivanovitch is very fond of receiving presents. They please him greatly.

A very fine man too is Ivan Nikiforovitch. They are such friends as the world never saw. Anton Prokofievitch Pupopuz, who goes about to this hour in his cinnamon-coloured surtout with blue sleeves and dines every Sunday with the judge, was in the habit of saying that the Devil himself had bound Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch together with a rope: where one went, the other followed.

Ivan Nikiforovitch has never married. Although it was reported that he was married it was completely false. I know Ivan Nikiforovitch very

well, and am able to state that he never even had any intention of marrying. Where do all these scandals originate? In the same way it was rumoured that Ivan Nikiforovitch was born with a tail! But this invention is so clumsy and at the same time so horrible and indecent that I do not even consider it necessary to refute it for the benefit of civilised readers, to whom it is doubtless known that only witches, and very few even of these, have tails. Witches, moreover, belong more to the feminine than to the masculine gender.

In spite of their great friendship, these rare friends are not always agreed between themselves. Their characters can best be judged by comparing them. Ivan Ivanovitch has the usual gift of speaking in an extremely pleasant manner. Heavens! How he does speak! The feeling can best be described by comparing it to that which you experience when some one combs your head or draws his finger softly across your heel. You listen and listen until you drop your head. Pleasant, exceedingly pleasant! like the sleep after a bath. Ivan Nikiforovitch, on the contrary, is more reticent; but if he once takes up his parable, look out for yourself! He can talk your head off.

Ivan Ivanovitch is tall and thin: Ivan Nikiforovitch is rather shorter in stature, but he makes it up in thickness. Ivan Ivanovitch's head is like a radish, tail down; Ivan Nikiforovitch's like a radish with the tail up. Ivan Ivanovitch lolls on the balcony in his shirt sleeves after dinner only: in the evening he dons his pelisse and goes out somewhere, either to the village shop, where he supplies flour, or into the fields to catch quail. Ivan Nikiforovitch lies all day at his porch: if the day is not too hot he generally turns his back to the sun and will not go anywhere. If it happens to occur to him in the morning he walks through the yard, inspects the domestic affairs, and retires again to his room. In early days he used to call on Ivan Ivanovitch. Ivan Ivanovitch is a very refined man, and never utters an impolite word. Ivan Nikiforovitch is not always on his guard. On such occasions Ivan Ivanovitch usually rises from his seat, and says, "Enough, enough, Ivan Nikiforovitch! It's better to go out at once than to utter such godless words."

Ivan Ivanovitch gets into a terrible rage if a fly falls into his beet-soup. Then he is fairly beside himself; he flings away his plate and the housekeeper catches it. Ivan Nikiforovitch is very fond of bathing; and when he gets up to the neck in water, orders a table and a samovar, or tea urn, to be placed on the water, for he is very fond of drinking tea in that cool position. Ivan Ivanovitch shaves twice a week; Ivan Nikiforovitch once. Ivan Ivanovitch is extremely curious. God preserve you if you begin to tell him anything and do not finish it! If he is displeased with anything he lets it be seen at once. It is very hard to tell from Ivan Nikiforovitch's countenance whether he is pleased or angry; even if he is rejoiced at anything, he will not show it. Ivan Ivanovitch is of a rather timid character: Ivan Nikiforovitch, on the

contrary, has, as the saying is, such full folds in his trousers that if you were to inflate them you might put the courtyard, with its storehouses and buildings, inside them.

Ivan Ivanovitch has large, expressive eyes, of a snuff colour, and a mouth shaped something like the letter V; Ivan Nikiforovitch has small, yellowish eyes, quite concealed between heavy brows and fat cheeks; and his nose is the shape of a ripe plum. If Ivanovitch treats you to snuff, he always licks the cover of his box first with his tongue, then taps on it with his finger and says, as he raises it, if you are an acquaintance, "Dare I beg you, sir, to give me the pleasure?" if a stranger, "Dare I beg you, sir, though I have not the honour of knowing your rank, name, and family, to do me the favour?" but Ivan Nikiforovitch puts his box straight into your hand and merely adds, "Do me the favour." Neither Ivan Ivanovitch nor Ivan Nikiforovitch loves fleas; and therefore, neither Ivan Ivanovitch nor Ivan Nikiforovitch will, on no account, admit a Jew with his wares, without purchasing of him remedies against these insects, after having first rated him well for belonging to the Hebrew faith.

But in spite of numerous dissimilarities, Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch are both very fine fellows.

CHAPTER II

FROM WHICH MAY BE SEEN WHENCE AROSE THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN IVAN IVANOVITCH AND IVAN NIKIFOROVITCH

One morning--it was in July--Ivan Ivanovitch was lying on his balcony. The day was warm; the air was dry, and came in gusts. Ivan Ivanovitch had been to town, to the mower's, and at the farm, and had succeeded in asking all the muzhiks and women whom he met all manner of questions. He was fearfully tired and had laid down to rest. As he lay there, he looked at the storehouse, the courtyard, the sheds, the chickens running about, and thought to himself, "Heavens! What a well-to-do man I am! What is there that I have not? Birds, buildings, granaries, everything I take a fancy to; genuine distilled vodka; pears and plums in the orchard; poppies, cabbages, peas in the garden; what is there that I have not? I should like to know what there is that I have not?"

As he put this question to himself, Ivan Ivanovitch reflected; and meantime his eyes, in their search after fresh objects, crossed the fence into Ivan Nikiforovitch's yard and involuntarily took note of a curious sight. A fat woman was bringing out clothes, which had been packed away, and spreading them out on the line to air. Presently an old uniform with worn trimmings was swinging its sleeves in the air

and embracing a brocade gown; from behind it peeped a court-coat, with buttons stamped with coats-of-arms, and moth-eaten collar; and white kersymere pantaloons with spots, which had once upon a time clothed Ivan Nikiforovitch's legs, and might now possibly fit his fingers. Behind them were speedily hung some more in the shape of the letter pi. Then came a blue Cossack jacket, which Ivan Nikiforovitch had had made twenty years before, when he was preparing to enter the militia, and allowed his moustache to grow. And one after another appeared a sword, projecting into the air like a spit, and the skirts of a grass-green caftan-like garment, with copper buttons the size of a five-kopek piece, unfolded themselves. From among the folds peeped a vest bound with gold, with a wide opening in front. The vest was soon concealed by an old petticoat belonging to his dead grandmother, with pockets which would have held a water-melon.

All these things piled together formed a very interesting spectacle for Ivan Ivanovitch; while the sun's rays, falling upon a blue or green sleeve, a red binding, or a scrap of gold brocade, or playing in the point of a sword, formed an unusual sight, similar to the representations of the Nativity given at farmhouses by wandering bands; particularly that part where the throng of people, pressing close together, gaze at King Herod in his golden crown or at Anthony leading his goat.

Presently the old woman crawled, grunting, from the storeroom, dragging after her an old-fashioned saddle with broken stirrups, worn leather holsters, and saddle-cloth, once red, with gilt embroidery and copper disks.

"Here's a stupid woman," thought Ivan Ivanovitch. "She'll be dragging Ivan Nikiforovitch out and airing him next."

Ivan Ivanovitch was not so far wrong in his surmise. Five minutes later, Ivan Nikiforovitch's nankeen trousers appeared, and took nearly half the yard to themselves. After that she fetched out a hat and a gun. "What's the meaning of this?" thought Ivan Ivanovitch. "I never knew Ivan Nikiforovitch had a gun. What does he want with it? Whether he shoots, or not, he keeps a gun! Of what use is it to him? But it's a splendid thing. I have long wanted just such a one. I should like that gun very much: I like to amuse myself with a gun. Hello, there, woman, woman!" shouted Ivan Ivanovitch, beckoning to her.

The old woman approached the fence.

"What's that you have there, my good woman?"

"A gun, as you see."

"What sort of a gun?"

"Who knows what sort of a gun? If it were mine, perhaps I should know what it is made of; but it is my master's, therefore I know nothing of it."

Ivan Ivanovitch rose, and began to examine the gun on all sides, and forgot to reprove the old woman for hanging it and the sword out to air.

"It must be iron," went on the old woman.

"Hm, iron! why iron?" said Ivan Ivanovitch. "Has your master had it long?"

"Yes; long, perhaps."

"It's a nice gun!" continued Ivan Ivanovitch. "I will ask him for it. What can he want with it? I'll make an exchange with him for it. Is your master at home, my good woman?"

"Yes."

"What is he doing? lying down?"

"Yes, lying down."

"Very well, I will come to him."

Ivan Ivanovitch dressed himself, took his well-seasoned stick for the benefit of the dogs, for, in Mirgorod, there are more dogs than people to be met in the street, and went out.

Although Ivan Nikiforovitch's house was next door to Ivan Ivanovitch's, so that you could have got from one to the other by climbing the fence, yet Ivan Ivanovitch went by way of the street. From the street it was necessary to turn into an alley which was so narrow that if two one-horse carts chanced to meet they could not get out, and were forced to remain there until the drivers, seizing the hind-wheels, dragged them back in opposite directions into the street, whilst pedestrians drew aside like flowers growing by the fence on either hand. Ivan Ivanovitch's waggon-shed adjoined this alley on one side; and on the other were Ivan Nikiforovitch's granary, gate, and pigeon-house.

Ivan Ivanovitch went up to the gate and rattled the latch. Within arose the barking of dogs; but the motley-haired pack ran back, wagging their tails when they saw the well-known face. Ivan Ivanovitch traversed the courtyard, in which were collected Indian doves, fed by Ivan Nikiforovitch's own hand, melon-rinds, vegetables, broken wheels,

barrel-hoops, and a small boy wallowing with dirty blouse--a picture such as painters love. The shadows of the fluttering clothes covered nearly the whole of the yard and lent it a degree of coolness. The woman greeted him with a bend of her head and stood, gaping, in one spot. The front of the house was adorned with a small porch, with its roof supported on two oak pillars--a welcome protection from the sun, which at that season in Little Russia loves not to jest, and bathes the pedestrian from head to foot in perspiration. It may be judged how powerful Ivan Ivanovitch's desire to obtain the coveted article was when he made up his mind, at such an hour, to depart from his usual custom, which was to walk abroad only in the evening.

The room which Ivan Ivanovitch entered was quite dark, for the shutters were closed; and the ray of sunlight passing through a hole made in one of them took on the colours of the rainbow, and, striking the opposite wall, sketched upon it a parti-coloured picture of the outlines of roofs, trees, and the clothes suspended in the yard, only upside down. This gave the room a peculiar half-light.

"God assist you!" said Ivan Ivanovitch.

"Ah! how do you do, Ivan Ivanovitch?" replied a voice from the corner of the room. Then only did Ivan Ivanovitch perceive Ivan Nikiforovitch lying upon a rug which was spread on the floor. "Excuse me for appearing before you in a state of nature."

"Not at all. You have been asleep, Ivan Nikiforovitch?"

"I have been asleep. Have you been asleep, Ivan Ivanovitch?"

"I have."

"And now you have risen?"

"Now I have risen. Christ be with you, Ivan Nikiforovitch! How can you sleep until this time? I have just come from the farm. There's very fine barley on the road, charming! and the hay is tall and soft and golden!"

"Gorpina!" shouted Ivan Nikiforovitch, "fetch Ivan Ivanovitch some vodka, and some pastry and sour cream!"

"Fine weather we're having to-day."

"Don't praise it, Ivan Ivanovitch! Devil take it! You can't get away from the heat."

"Now, why need you mention the devil! Ah, Ivan Nikiforovitch! you will recall my words when it's too late. You will suffer in the next world

for such godless words."

"How have I offended you, Ivan Ivanovitch? I have not attacked your father nor your mother. I don't know how I have insulted you."

"Enough, enough, Ivan Nikiforovitch!"

"By Heavens, Ivan Ivanovitch, I did not insult you!"

"It's strange that the quails haven't come yet to the whistle."

"Think what you please, but I have not insulted you in any way."

"I don't know why they don't come," said Ivan Ivanovitch, as if he did not hear Ivan Nikiforovitch; "it is more than time for them already; but they seem to need more time for some reason."

"You say that the barley is good?"

"Splendid barley, splendid!"

A silence ensued.

"So you are having your clothes aired, Ivan Nikiforovitch?" said Ivan Ivanovitch at length.

"Yes; those cursed women have ruined some beautiful clothes; almost new they were too. Now I'm having them aired; the cloth is fine and good. They only need turning to make them fit to wear again."

"One thing among them pleased me extremely, Ivan Nikiforovitch."

"What was that?"

"Tell me, please, what use do you make of the gun that has been put to air with the clothes?" Here Ivan Ivanovitch offered his snuff. "May I ask you to do me the favour?"

"By no means! take it yourself; I will use my own." Thereupon Ivan Nikiforovitch felt about him, and got hold of his snuff-box. "That stupid woman! So she hung the gun out to air. That Jew at Sorotchintzi makes good snuff. I don't know what he puts in it, but it is so very fragrant. It is a little like tansy. Here, take a little and chew it; isn't it like tansy?"

"Ivan Nikiforovitch, I want to talk about that gun; what are you going to do with it? You don't need it."

"Why don't I need it? I might want to go shooting."

"God be with you, Ivan Nikiforovitch! When will you go shooting? At the millennium, perhaps? So far as I know, or any one can recollect, you never killed even a duck; yes, and you are not built to go shooting. You have a dignified bearing and figure; how are you to drag yourself about the marshes, especially when your garment, which it is not polite to mention in conversation by name, is being aired at this very moment? No; you require rest, repose." Ivan Ivanovitch as has been hinted at above, employed uncommonly picturesque language when it was necessary to persuade any one. How he talked! Heavens, how he could talk! "Yes, and you require polite actions. See here, give it to me!"

"The idea! The gun is valuable; you can't find such guns anywhere nowadays. I bought it of a Turk when I joined the militia; and now, to give it away all of a sudden! Impossible! It is an indispensable article."

"Indispensable for what?"

"For what? What if robbers should attack the house?... Indispensable indeed! Glory to God! I know that a gun stands in my storehouse."

"A fine gun that! Why, Ivan Nikiforovitch, the lock is ruined."

"What do you mean by ruined? It can be set right; all that needs to be done is to rub it with hemp-oil, so that it may not rust."

"I see in your words, Ivan Nikiforovitch, anything but a friendly disposition towards me. You will do nothing for me in token of friendship."

"How can you say, Ivan Ivanovitch, that I show you no friendship? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Your oxen pasture on my steppes and I have never interfered with them. When you go to Poltava, you always ask for my waggon, and what then? Have I ever refused? Your children climb over the fence into my yard and play with my dogs--I never say anything; let them play, so long as they touch nothing; let them play!"

"If you won't give it to me, then let us make some exchange."

"What will you give me for it?" Thereupon Ivan Nikiforovitch raised himself on his elbow, and looked at Ivan Ivanovitch.

"I will give you my dark-brown sow, the one I have fed in the sty. A magnificent sow. You'll see, she'll bring you a litter of pigs next year."

"I do not see, Ivan Ivanovitch, how you can talk so. What could I do with your sow? Make a funeral dinner for the devil?"

"Again! You can't get along without the devil! It's a sin! by Heaven, it's a sin, Ivan Nikiforovitch!"

"What do you mean, Ivan Ivanovitch, by offering the deuce knows what kind of a sow for my gun?"

"Why is she 'the deuce knows what,' Ivan Nikiforovitch?"

"Why? You can judge for yourself perfectly well; here's the gun, a known thing; but the deuce knows what that sow is like! If it had not been you who said it, Ivan Ivanovitch, I might have put an insulting construction on it."

"What defect have you observed in the sow?"

"For what do you take me--for a sow?"

"Sit down, sit down! I won't--No matter about your gun; let it rot and rust where it stands in the corner of the storeroom. I don't want to say anything more about it!"

After this a pause ensued.

"They say," began Ivan Ivanovitch, "that three kings have declared war against our Tzar."

"Yes, Peter Feodorovitch told me so. What sort of war is this, and why is it?"

"I cannot say exactly, Ivan Nikiforovitch, what the cause is. I suppose the kings want us to adopt the Turkish faith."

"Fools! They would have it," said Ivan Nikiforovitch, raising his head.

"So, you see, our Tzar has declared war on them in consequence. 'No,' says he, 'do you adopt the faith of Christ!'"

"Oh, our people will beat them, Ivan Ivanovitch!"

"They will. So you won't exchange the gun, Ivan Nikiforovitch?"

"It's a strange thing to me, Ivan Ivanovitch, that you, who seem to be a man distinguished for sense, should talk such nonsense. What a fool I should be!"

"Sit down, sit down. God be with it! let it burst! I won't mention it again."

At this moment lunch was brought in.

Ivan Ivanovitch drank a glass and ate a pie with sour cream. "Listen, Ivan Nikiforovitch: I will give you, besides the sow, two sacks of oats. You did not sow any oats. You'll have to buy some this year in any case."

"By Heaven, Ivan Ivanovitch, I must tell you you are very foolish! Who ever heard of swapping a gun for two sacks of oats? Never fear, you don't offer your coat."

"But you forget, Ivan Nikiforovitch, that I am to give you the sow too."

"What! two sacks of oats and a sow for a gun?"

"Why, is it too little?"

"For a gun?"

"Of course, for a gun."

"Two sacks for a gun?"

"Two sacks, not empty, but filled with oats; and you've forgotten the sow."

"Kiss your sow; and if you don't like that, then go to the Evil One!"

"Oh, get angry now, do! See here; they'll stick your tongue full of red-hot needles in the other world for such godless words. After a conversation with you, one has to wash one's face and hands and fumigate one's self."

"Excuse me, Ivan Ivanovitch; my gun is a choice thing, a most curious thing; and besides, it is a very agreeable decoration in a room."

"You go on like a fool about that gun of yours, Ivan Nikiforovitch," said Ivan Ivanovitch with vexation; for he was beginning to be really angry.

"And you, Ivan Ivanovitch, are a regular goose!"

If Ivan Nikiforovitch had not uttered that word they would not have quarrelled, but would have parted friends as usual; but now things took quite another turn. Ivan Ivanovitch flew into a rage.

"What was that you said, Ivan Nikiforovitch?" he said, raising his voice.

"I said you were like a goose, Ivan Ivanovitch!"

"How dare you, sir, forgetful of decency and the respect due to a man's rank and family, insult him with such a disgraceful name!"

"What is there disgraceful about it? And why are you flourishing your hands so, Ivan Ivanovitch?"

"How dared you, I repeat, in disregard of all decency, call me a goose?"

"I spit on your head, Ivan Ivanovitch! What are you screeching about?"

Ivan Ivanovitch could no longer control himself. His lips quivered; his mouth lost its usual V shape, and became like the letter O; he glared so that he was terrible to look at. This very rarely happened with Ivan Ivanovitch: it was necessary that he should be extremely angry at first.

"Then, I declare to you," exclaimed Ivan Ivanovitch, "that I will no longer know you!"

"A great pity! By Heaven, I shall never weep on that account!" retorted Ivan Nikiforovitch. He lied, by Heaven, he lied! for it was very annoying to him.

"I will never put my foot inside your house gain!"

"Oho, ho!" said Ivan Nikiforovitch, vexed, yet not knowing himself what to do, and rising to his feet, contrary to his custom. "Hey, there, woman, boy!" Thereupon there appeared at the door the same fat woman and the small boy, now enveloped in a long and wide coat. "Take Ivan Ivanovitch by the arms and lead him to the door!"

"What! a nobleman?" shouted Ivan Ivanovitch with a feeling of vexation and dignity. "Just do it if you dare! Come on! I'll annihilate you and your stupid master. The crows won't be able to find your bones." Ivan Ivanovitch spoke with uncommon force when his spirit was up.

The group presented a striking picture: Ivan Nikiforovitch standing in the middle of the room; the woman with her mouth wide open and a senseless, terrified look on her face, and Ivan Ivanovitch with uplifted hand, as the Roman tribunes are depicted. This was a magnificent spectacle: and yet there was but one spectator; the boy in the ample coat, who stood quite quietly and picked his nose with his finger.

Finally Ivan Ivanovitch took his hat. "You have behaved well, Ivan Nikiforovitch, extremely well! I shall remember it."

"Go, Ivan Ivanovitch, go! and see that you don't come in my way: if you do, I'll beat your ugly face to a jelly, Ivan Ivanovitch!"

"Take that, Ivan Nikiforovitch!" retorted Ivan Ivanovitch, making an insulting gesture and banged the door, which squeaked and flew open again behind him.

Ivan Nikiforovitch appeared at it and wanted to add something more; but Ivan Ivanovitch did not glance back and hastened from the yard.

CHAPTER III

WHAT TOOK PLACE AFTER IVAN IVANOVITCH'S QUARREL WITH IVAN NIKIFOROVITCH

And thus two respectable men, the pride and honour of Mirgorod, had quarrelled, and about what? About a bit of nonsense--a goose. They would not see each other, broke off all connection, though hitherto they had been known as the most inseparable friends. Every day Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch had sent to inquire about each other's health, and often conversed together from their balconies and said such charming things as did the heart good to listen to. On Sundays, Ivan Ivanovitch, in his lambskin pelisse, and Ivan Nikiforovitch, in his cinnamon-coloured nankeen spencer, used to set out for church almost arm in arm; and if Ivan Ivanovitch, who had remarkably sharp eyes, was the first to catch sight of a puddle or any dirt in the street, which sometimes happened in Mirgorod, he always said to Ivan Nikiforovitch, "Look out! don't put your foot there, it's dirty." Ivan Nikiforovitch, on his side, exhibited the same touching tokens of friendship; and whenever he chanced to be standing, always held out his hand to Ivan Ivanovitch with his snuff-box, saying: "Do me the favour!" And what fine managers both were!--And these two friends!--When I heard of it, it struck me like a flash of lightning. For a long time I would not believe it. Ivan Ivanovitch quarrelling with Ivan Nikiforovitch! Such worthy people! What is to be depended upon, then, in this world?

When Ivan Ivanovitch reached home, he remained for some time in a state of strong excitement. He usually went, first of all, to the stable to see whether his mare was eating her hay; for he had a bay mare with a white star on her forehead, and a very pretty little mare she was too; then to feed the turkeys and the little pigs with his own hand, and then to his room, where he either made wooden dishes, for he could make various vessels of wood very tastefully, quite as well as any turner, or read a book printed by Liubia, Garia, and Popoff (Ivan Ivanovitch could

never remember the name, because the serving-maid had long before torn off the top part of the title-page while amusing the children), or rested on the balcony. But now he did not betake himself to any of his ordinary occupations. Instead, on encountering Gapka, he at once began to scold her for loitering about without any occupation, though she was carrying groats to the kitchen; flung a stick at a cock which came upon the balcony for his customary treat; and when the dirty little boy, in his little torn blouse, ran up to him and shouted: "Papa, papa! give me a honey-cake," he threatened him and stamped at him so fiercely that the frightened child fled, God knows whither.

But at last he bethought himself, and began to busy himself about his every-day duties. He dined late, and it was almost night when he lay down to rest on the balcony. A good beet-soup with pigeons, which Gapka had cooked for him, quite drove from his mind the occurrences of the morning. Again Ivan Ivanovitch began to gaze at his belongings with satisfaction. At length his eye rested on the neighbouring yard; and he said to himself, "I have not been to Ivan Nikiforovitch's to-day: I'll go there now." So saying, Ivan Ivanovitch took his stick and his hat, and directed his steps to the street; but scarcely had he passed through the gate than he recollected the quarrel, spit, and turned back. Almost the same thing happened at Ivan Nikiforovitch's house. Ivan Ivanovitch saw the woman put her foot on the fence, with the intention of climbing over into his yard, when suddenly Ivan Nikiforovitch's voice was heard crying: "Come back! it won't do!" But Ivan Ivanovitch found it very tiresome. It is quite possible that these worthy men would have made their peace next day if a certain occurrence in Ivan Nikiforovitch's house had not destroyed all hopes and poured oil upon the fire of enmity which was ready to die out.

On the evening of that very day, Agafya Fedosyevna arrived at Ivan Nikiforovitch's. Agafya Fedosyevna was not Ivan Nikiforovitch's relative, nor his sister-in-law, nor even his fellow-godparent. There seemed to be no reason why she should come to him, and he was not particularly glad of her company; still, she came, and lived on him for weeks at a time, and even longer. Then she took possession of the keys and took the management of the whole house into her own hands. This was extremely displeasing to Ivan Nikiforovitch; but he, to his amazement, obeyed her like a child; and although he occasionally attempted to dispute, yet Agafya Fedosyevna always got the better of him.

I must confess that I do not understand why things are so arranged, that women should seize us by the nose as deftly as they do the handle of a teapot. Either their hands are so constructed or else our noses are good

for nothing else. And notwithstanding the fact that Ivan Nikiforovitch's nose somewhat resembled a plum, she grasped that nose and led him about after her like a dog. He even, in her presence, involuntarily altered his ordinary manner of life.

Agafya Fedosyevna wore a cap on her head, and a coffee-coloured cloak with yellow flowers and had three warts on her nose. Her figure was like a cask, and it would have been as hard to tell where to look for her waist as for her to see her nose without a mirror. Her feet were small and shaped like two cushions. She talked scandal, ate boiled beet-soup in the morning, and swore extremely; and amidst all these various occupations her countenance never for one instant changed its expression, which phenomenon, as a rule, women alone are capable of displaying.

As soon as she arrived, everything went wrong.

"Ivan Nikiforovitch, don't you make peace with him, nor ask his forgiveness; he wants to ruin you; that's the kind of man he is! you don't know him yet!" That cursed woman whispered and whispered, and managed so that Ivan Nikiforovitch would not even hear Ivan Ivanovitch mentioned.

Everything assumed another aspect. If his neighbour's dog ran into the yard, it was beaten within an inch of its life; the children, who climbed over the fence, were sent back with howls, their little shirts stripped up, and marks of a switch behind. Even the old woman, when Ivan Ivanovitch ventured to ask her about something, did something so insulting that Ivan Ivanovitch, being an extremely delicate man, only spit, and muttered, "What a nasty woman! even worse than her master!"

Finally, as a climax to all the insults, his hated neighbour built a goose-shed right against his fence at the spot where they usually climbed over, as if with the express intention of redoubling the insult. This shed, so hateful to Ivan Ivanovitch, was constructed with diabolical swiftness--in one day.

This aroused wrath and a desire for revenge in Ivan Ivanovitch. He showed no signs of bitterness, in spite of the fact that the shed encroached on his land; but his heart beat so violently that it was extremely difficult for him to preserve his calm appearance.

He passed the day in this manner. Night came--Oh, if I were a painter, how magnificently I would depict the night's charms! I would describe how all Mirgorod sleeps; how steadily the myriads of stars gaze down upon it; how the apparent quiet is filled far and near with the barking of dogs; how the love-sick sacristan steals past them, and scales the fence with knightly fearlessness; how the white walls of the houses,

bathed in the moonlight, grow whiter still, the overhanging trees darker; how the shadows of the trees fall blacker, the flowers and the silent grass become more fragrant, and the crickets, unharmonious cavaliers of the night, strike up their rattling song in friendly fashion on all sides. I would describe how, in one of the little, low-roofed, clay houses, the black-browed village maid, tossing on her lonely couch, dreams with heaving bosom of some hussar's spurs and moustache, and how the moonlight smiles upon her cheeks. I would describe how the black shadows of the bats flit along the white road before they alight upon the white chimneys of the cottages.

But it would hardly be within my power to depict Ivan Ivanovitch as he crept out that night, saw in hand; or the various emotions written on his countenance! Quietly, most quietly, he crawled along and climbed upon the goose-shed. Ivan Nikiforovitch's dogs knew nothing, as yet, of the quarrel between them; and so they permitted him, as an old friend, to enter the shed, which rested upon four oaken posts. Creeping up to the nearest post he applied his saw and began to cut. The noise produced by the saw caused him to glance about him every moment, but the recollection of the insult restored his courage. The first post was sawed through. Ivan Ivanovitch began upon the next. His eyes burned and he saw nothing for terror.

All at once he uttered an exclamation and became petrified with fear. A ghost appeared to him; but he speedily recovered himself on perceiving that it was a goose, thrusting its neck out at him. Ivan Ivanovitch spit with vexation and proceeded with his work. The second post was sawed through; the building trembled. His heart beat so violently when he began on the third, that he had to stop several times. The post was more than half sawed through when the frail building quivered violently.

Ivan Ivanovitch had barely time to spring back when it came down with a crash. Seizing his saw, he ran home in the greatest terror and flung himself upon his bed, without having sufficient courage to peep from the window at the consequences of his terrible deed. It seemed to him as though Ivan Nikiforovitch's entire household--the old woman, Ivan Nikiforovitch, the boy in the endless coat, all with sticks, and led by Agafya Fedosyevna--were coming to tear down and destroy his house.

Ivan Ivanovitch passed the whole of the following day in a perfect fever. It seemed to him that his detested neighbour would set fire to his house at least in revenge for this; and so he gave orders to Gapka to keep a constant lookout, everywhere, and see whether dry straw were laid against it anywhere. Finally, in order to forestall Ivan Nikiforovitch, he determined to enter a complaint against him before the district judge of Mirgorod. In what it consisted can be learned from the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT TOOK PLACE BEFORE THE DISTRICT JUDGE OF MIRGOROD

A wonderful town is Mirgorod! How many buildings are there with straw, rush, and even wooden roofs! On the right is a street, on the left a street, and fine fences everywhere. Over them twine hop-vines, upon them hang pots; from behind them the sunflowers show their sun-like heads, poppies blush, fat pumpkins peep; all is luxury itself! The fence is invariably garnished with articles which render it still more picturesque: woman's widespread undergarments of checked woollen stuff, shirts, or trousers. There is no such thing as theft or rascality in Mirgorod, so everybody hangs upon his fence whatever strikes his fancy. If you go on to the square, you will surely stop and admire the view: such a wonderful pool is there! The finest you ever saw. It occupies nearly the whole of the square. A truly magnificent pool! The houses and cottages, which at a distance might be mistaken for hayricks, stand around it, lost in admiration of its beauty.

But I agree with those who think that there is no better house than that of the district judge. Whether it is of oak or birch is nothing to the point; but it has, my dear sirs, eight windows! eight windows in a row, looking directly on the square and upon that watery expanse which I have just mentioned, and which the chief of police calls a lake. It alone is painted the colour of granite. All the other houses in Mirgorod are merely whitewashed. Its roof is of wood, and would have been even painted red, had not the government clerks eaten the oil which had been prepared for that purpose, as it happened during a fast; and so the roof remained unpainted. Towards the square projects a porch, which the chickens frequently visit, because that porch is nearly always strewn with grain or something edible, not intentionally, but through the carelessness of visitors.

The house is divided into two parts: one of which is the court-room; the other the jail. In the half which contains the court-room are two neat, whitewashed rooms, the front one for clients, the other having a table adorned with ink-spots, and with a looking-glass upon it, and four oak chairs with tall backs; whilst along the wall stand iron-bound chests, in which are preserved bundles of papers relating to district law-suits. Upon one of the chests stood at that time a pair of boots, polished with wax.

The court had been open since morning. The judge, a rather stout man, though thinner than Ivan Nikiforovitch, with a good-natured face, a greasy dressing-gown, a pipe, and a cup of tea, was conversing with the clerk of the court.

The judge's lips were directly under his nose, so that he could snuff his upper lip as much as he liked. It served him instead of a snuff-box, for the snuff intended for his nose almost always lodged upon it. So the judge was talking with the assistant. A barefooted girl stood holding a tray with cups at once side of them. At the end of the table, the secretary was reading the decision in some case, but in such a mournful and monotonous voice that the condemned man himself would have fallen asleep while listening to it. The judge, no doubt, would have been the first to do so had he not entered into an engrossing conversation while it was going on.

"I expressly tried to find out," said the judge, sipping his already cold tea from the cup, "how they manage to sing so well. I had a splendid thrush two years ago. Well, all of a sudden he was completely done for, and began to sing, God knows what! He got worse and worse and worse and worse as time went on; he began to rattle and get hoarse--just good for nothing! And this is how it happened: a little lump, not so big as a pea, had come under his throat. It was only necessary to prick that little swelling with a needle--Zachar Prokofievitch taught me that; and, if you like, I'll just tell you how it was. I went to him--"

"Shall I read another, Demyan Demyanovitch?" broke in the secretary, who had not been reading for several minutes.

"Have you finished already? Only think how quickly! And I did not hear a word of it! Where is it? Give it me and I'll sign it. What else have you there?"

"The case of Cossack Bokitok for stealing a cow."

"Very good; read it!--Yes, so I went to him--I can even tell you in detail how he entertained me. There was vodka, and dried sturgeon, excellent! Yes, not our sturgeon," there the judge smacked his tongue and smiled, upon which his nose took a sniff at its usual snuff-box, "such as our Mirgorod shops sell us. I ate no herrings, for, as you know, they give me heart-burn; but I tasted the caviare--very fine caviare, too! There's no doubt it, excellent! Then I drank some peach-brandy, real gentian. There was saffron-brandy also; but, as you know, I never take that. You see, it was all very good. In the first place, to whet your appetite, as they say, and then to satisfy it--Ah! speak of an angel," exclaimed the judge, all at once, catching sight of Ivan Ivanovitch as he entered.

"God be with us! I wish you a good-morning," said Ivan Ivanovitch, bowing all round with his usual politeness. How well he understood the art of fascinating everybody in his manner! I never beheld such refinement. He knew his own worth quite well, and therefore looked for

universal respect as his due. The judge himself handed Ivan Ivanovitch a chair; and his nose inhaled all the snuff resting on his upper lip, which, with him, was always a sign of great pleasure.

"What will you take, Ivan Ivanovitch?" he inquired: "will you have a cup of tea?"

"No, much obliged," replied Ivan Ivanovitch, as he bowed and seated himself.

"Do me the favour--one little cup," repeated the judge.

"No, thank you; much obliged for your hospitality," replied Ivan Ivanovitch, and rose, bowed, and sat down again.

"Just one little cup," repeated the judge.

"No, do not trouble yourself, Demyan Demyanovitch." Whereupon Ivan Ivanovitch again rose, bowed, and sat down.

"A little cup!"

"Very well, then, just a little cup," said Ivan Ivanovitch, and reached out his hand to the tray. Heavens! What a height of refinement there was in that man! It is impossible to describe what a pleasant impression such manners produce!

"Will you not have another cup?"

"I thank you sincerely," answered Ivan Ivanovitch, turning his cup upside down upon the tray and bowing.

"Do me the favour, Ivan Ivanovitch."

"I cannot; much obliged." Thereupon Ivan Ivanovitch bowed and sat down.

"Ivan Ivanovitch, for the sake of our friendship, just one little cup!"

"No: I am extremely indebted for your hospitality." So saying, Ivan Ivanovitch bowed and seated himself.

"Only a cup, one little cup!"

Ivan Ivanovitch put his hand out to the tray and took a cup. Oh, the deuce! How can a man contrive to support his dignity!

"Demyan Demyanovitch," said Ivan Ivanovitch, swallowing the last drain, "I have pressing business with you; I want to enter a complaint."

Then Ivan Ivanovitch set down his cup, and drew from his pocket a sheet of stamped paper, written over. "A complaint against my enemy, my declared enemy."

"And who is that?"

"Ivan Nikiforovitch Dovgotchkun."

At these words, the judge nearly fell off his chair. "What do you say?" he exclaimed, clasping his hands; "Ivan Ivanovitch, is this you?"

"You see yourself that it is I."

"The Lord and all the saints be with you! What! You! Ivan Ivanovitch! you have fallen out with Ivan Nikiforovitch! Is it your mouth which says that? Repeat it! Is not some one hid behind you who is speaking instead of you?"

"What is there incredible about it? I can't endure the sight of him: he has done me a deadly injury--he has insulted my honour."

"Holy Trinity! How am I to believe my mother now? Why, every day, when I quarrel with my sister, the old woman says, 'Children, you live together like dogs. If you would only take pattern by Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch, they are friends indeed! such friends! such worthy people!' There you are with your friend! Tell me what this is about. How is it?"

"It is a delicate business, Demyan Demyanovitch; it is impossible to relate it in words: be pleased rather to read my plaint. Here, take it by this side; it is more convenient."

"Read it, Taras Tikhonovitch," said the judge, turning to the secretary.

Taras Tikhonovitch took the plaint; and blowing his nose, as all district judges' secretaries blow their noses, with the assistance of two fingers, he began to read:--

"From the nobleman and landed proprietor of the Mirgorod District, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, a plaint: concerning which the following points are to be noted:--

"1. Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, nobleman, known to all the world for his godless acts, which inspire disgust, and in lawlessness exceed all bounds, on the seventh day of July of this year 1810, inflicted upon me a deadly insult, touching my personal honour, and likewise tending to the humiliation and confusion of my rank and family. The said nobleman,

of repulsive aspect, has also a pugnacious disposition, and is full to overflowing with blasphemy and quarrelsome words."

Here the reader paused for an instant to blow his nose again; but the judge folded his hands in approbation and murmured to himself, "What a ready pen! Lord! how this man does write!"

Ivan Ivanovitch requested that the reading might proceed, and Taras Tikhonovitch went on:--

"The said Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, when I went to him with a friendly proposition, called me publicly by an epithet insulting and injurious to my honour, namely, a goose, whereas it is known to the whole district of Mirgorod, that I never was named after that disgusting creature, and have no intention of ever being named after it. The proof of my noble extraction is that, in the baptismal register to be found in the Church of the Three Bishops, the day of my birth, and likewise the fact of my baptism, are inscribed. But a goose, as is well known to every one who has any knowledge of science, cannot be inscribed in the baptismal register; for a goose is not a man but a fowl; which, likewise, is sufficiently well known even to persons who have not been to college. But the said evil-minded nobleman, being privy to all these facts, affronted me with the aforesaid foul word, for no other purpose than to offer a deadly insult to my rank and station.

"2. And the same impolite and indecent nobleman, moreover, attempted injury to my property, inherited by me from my father, a member of the clerical profession, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Onisieff, of blessed memory, inasmuch that he, contrary to all law, transported directly opposite my porch a goose-shed, which was done with no other intention that to emphasise the insult offered me; for the said shed had, up to that time, stood in a very suitable situation, and was still sufficiently strong. But the loathsome intention of the aforesaid nobleman consisted simply in this: viz., in making me a witness of unpleasant occurrences; for it is well known that no man goes into a shed, much less into a goose-shed, for polite purposes. In the execution of his lawless deed, the two front posts trespassed on my land, received by me during the lifetime of my father, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Onisieff, of blessed memory, beginning at the granary, thence in a straight line to the spot where the women wash the pots.

"3. The above-described nobleman, whose very name and surname inspire thorough disgust, cherishes in his mind a malicious design to burn me in my own house. Which the infallible signs, hereinafter mentioned, fully demonstrate; in the first place, the said wicked nobleman has begun to emerge frequently from his apartments, which he never did formerly on account of his laziness and the disgusting corpulence of his body; in the second place, in his servants' apartments, adjoining the fence,

surrounding my own land, received by me from my father of blessed memory, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Onisieff, a light burns every day, and for a remarkably long period of time, which is also a clear proof of the fact. For hitherto, owing to his repulsive niggardliness, not only the tallow-candle but also the grease-lamp has been extinguished.

"And therefore I pray that the said nobleman, Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, being plainly guilty of incendiarism, of insult to my rank, name, and family, and of illegal appropriation of my property, and, worse than all else, of malicious and deliberate addition to my surname, of the nickname of goose, be condemned by the court, to fine, satisfaction, costs, and damages, and, being chained, be removed to the town jail, and that judgment be rendered upon this, my plaint, immediately and without delay.

"Written and composed by Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, nobleman, and landed proprietor of Mirgorod."

After the reading of the plaint was concluded, the judge approached Ivanovitch, took him by the button, and began to talk to him after this fashion: "What are you doing, Ivan Ivanovitch? Fear God! throw away that plaint, let it go! may Satan carry it off! Better take Ivan Nikiforovitch by the hand and kiss him, buy some Santurinski or Nikopolski liquor, make a punch, and call me in. We will drink it up together and forget all unpleasantness."

"No, Demyan Demyanovitch! it's not that sort of an affair," said Ivan Ivanovitch, with the dignity which always became him so well; "it is not an affair which can be arranged by a friendly agreement. Farewell! Good-day to you, too, gentlemen," he continued with the same dignity, turning to them all. "I hope that my plaint will lead to proper action being taken;" and out he went, leaving all present in a state of stupefaction.

The judge sat down without uttering a word; the secretary took a pinch of snuff; the clerks upset some broken fragments of bottles which served for inkstands; and the judge himself, in absence of mind, spread out a puddle of ink upon the table with his finger.

"What do you say to this, Dorofei Trofimovitch?" said the judge, turning to the assistant after a pause.

"I've nothing to say," replied the clerk.

"What things do happen!" continued the judge. He had not finished saying this before the door creaked and the front half of Ivan Nikiforovitch presented itself in the court-room; the rest of him remaining in the ante-room. The appearance of Ivan Nikiforovitch, and in court too,

seemed so extraordinary that the judge screamed; the secretary stopped reading; one clerk, in his frieze imitation of a dress-coat, took his pen in his lips; and the other swallowed a fly. Even the constable on duty and the watchman, a discharged soldier who up to that moment had stood by the door scratching about his dirty tunic, with chevrons on its arm, dropped his jaw and trod on some one's foot.

"What chance brings you here? How is your health, Ivan Nikiforovitch?"

But Ivan Nikiforovitch was neither dead nor alive; for he was stuck fast in the door, and could not take a step either forwards or backwards. In vain did the judge shout into the ante-room that some one there should push Ivan Nikiforovitch forward into the court-room. In the ante-room there was only one old woman with a petition, who, in spite of all the efforts of her bony hands, could accomplish nothing. Then one of the clerks, with thick lips, a thick nose, eyes which looked askance and intoxicated, broad shoulders, and ragged elbows, approached the front half of Ivan Nikiforovitch, crossed his hands for him as though he had been a child, and winked at the old soldier, who braced his knee against Ivan Nikiforovitch's belly, so, in spite of the latter's piteous moans, he was squeezed out into the ante-room. Then they pulled the bolts, and opened the other half of the door. Meanwhile the clerk and his assistant, breathing hard with their friendly exertions, exhaled such a strong odour that the court-room seemed temporarily turned into a drinking-room.

"Are you hurt, Ivan Nikiforovitch? I will tell my mother to send you a decoction of brandy, with which you need but to rub your back and stomach and all your pains will disappear."

But Ivan Nikiforovitch dropped into a chair, and could utter no word beyond prolonged oh's. Finally, in a faint and barely audible voice from fatigue, he exclaimed, "Wouldn't you like some?" and drawing his snuff-box from his pocket, added, "Help yourself, if you please."

"Very glad to see you," replied the judge; "but I cannot conceive what made you put yourself to so much trouble, and favour us with so unexpected an honour."

"A plaint!" Ivan Nikiforovitch managed to ejaculate.

"A plaint? What plaint?"

"A complaint..." here his asthma entailed a prolonged pause--"Oh! a complaint against that rascal--Ivan Ivanovitch Pererepenko!"

"And you too! Such particular friends! A complaint against such a benevolent man?"

"He's Satan himself!" ejaculated Ivan Nikiforovitch abruptly.

The judge crossed himself.

"Take my plaint, and read it."

"There is nothing to be done. Read it, Taras Tikhonovitch," said the judge, turning to the secretary with an expression of displeasure, which caused his nose to sniff at his upper lip, which generally occurred only as a sign of great enjoyment. This independence on the part of his nose caused the judge still greater vexation. He pulled out his handkerchief, and rubbed off all the snuff from his upper lip in order to punish it for its daring.

The secretary, having gone through the usual performance, which he always indulged in before he began to read, that is to say, blowing his nose without the aid of a pocket-handkerchief, began in his ordinary voice, in the following manner:--

"Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, nobleman of the Mirgorod District, presents a plaint, and begs to call attention to the following points:--

"1. Through his hateful malice and plainly manifested ill-will, the person calling himself a nobleman, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, perpetrates against me every manner of injury, damage, and like spiteful deeds, which inspire me with terror. Yesterday afternoon, like a brigand and thief, with axes, saws, chisels, and various locksmith's tools, he came by night into my yard and into my own goose-shed located within it, and with his own hand, and in outrageous manner, destroyed it; for which very illegal and burglarious deed on my side I gave no manner of cause.

"2. The same nobleman Pererepenko has designs upon my life; and on the 7th of last month, cherishing this design in secret, he came to me, and began, in a friendly and insidious manner, to ask of me a gun which was in my chamber, and offered me for it, with the miserliness peculiar to him, many worthless objects, such as a brown sow and two sacks of oats. Divining at that time his criminal intentions, I endeavoured in every way to dissuade him from it: but the said rascal and scoundrel, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, abused me like a muzhik, and since that time has cherished against me an irreconcilable enmity. His sister was well known to every one as a loose character, and went off with a regiment of chasseurs which was stationed at Mirgorod five years ago; but she inscribed her husband as a peasant. His father and mother too were not law-abiding people, and both were inconceivable drunkards. The afore-mentioned nobleman and robber, Pererepenko, in his beastly and blameworthy actions, goes beyond all his family, and under the guise of piety does the most immoral things. He does not observe the fasts; for

on the eve of St. Philip's this atheist bought a sheep, and next day ordered his mistress, Gapka, to kill it, alleging that he needed tallow for lamps and candles at once.

"Therefore I pray that the said nobleman, a manifest robber, church-thief, and rascal, convicted of plundering and stealing, may be put in irons, and confined in the jail or the government prison, and there, under supervision, deprived of his rank and nobility, well flogged, and banished to forced labour in Siberia, and that he may be commanded to pay damages and costs, and that judgment may be rendered on this my petition.

"To this plaint, Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, noble of the Mirgorod district, has set his hand."

As soon as the secretary had finished reading, Ivan Nikiforovitch seized his hat and bowed, with the intention of departing.

"Where are you going, Ivan Nikiforovitch?" the judge called after him. "Sit down a little while. Have some tea. Orishko, why are you standing there, you stupid girl, winking at the clerks? Go, bring tea."

But Ivan Nikiforovitch, in terror at having got so far from home, and at having undergone such a fearful quarantine, made haste to crawl through the door, saying, "Don't trouble yourself. It is with pleasure that I--" and closed it after him, leaving all present stupefied.

There was nothing to be done. Both plaints were entered; and the affair promised to assume a sufficiently serious aspect when an unforeseen occurrence lent an added interest to it. As the judge was leaving the court in company with the clerk and secretary, and the employees were thrusting into sacks the fowls, eggs, loaves, pies, cracknels, and other odds and ends brought by the plaintiffs--just at that moment a brown sow rushed into the room and snatched, to the amazement of the spectators, neither a pie nor a crust of bread but Ivan Nikiforovitch's plaint, which lay at the end of the table with its leaves hanging over. Having seized the document, mistress sow ran off so briskly that not one of the clerks or officials could catch her, in spite of the rulers and ink-bottles they hurled after her.

This extraordinary occurrence produced a terrible muddle, for there had not even been a copy taken of the plaint. The judge, that is to say, his secretary and the assistant debated for a long time upon such an unheard-of affair. Finally it was decided to write a report of the matter to the governor, as the investigation of the matter pertained more to the department of the city police. Report No. 389 was despatched to him that same day; and also upon that day there came to light a sufficiently curious explanation, which the reader may learn from the

following chapter.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH ARE DETAILED THE DELIBERATIONS OF TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES OF MIRGOROD

As soon as Ivan Ivanovitch had arranged his domestic affairs and stepped out upon the balcony, according to his custom, to lie down, he saw, to his indescribable amazement, something red at the gate. This was the red facings of the chief of police's coat, which were polished equally with his collar, and resembled varnished leather on the edges.

Ivan Ivanovitch thought to himself, "It's not bad that Peter Feodorovitch has come to talk it over with me." But he was very much surprised to see that the chief was walking remarkably fast and flourishing his hands, which was very rarely the case with him. There were eight buttons on the chief of police's uniform: the ninth, torn off in some manner during the procession at the consecration of the church two years before, the police had not been able to find up to this time: although the chief, on the occasion of the daily reports made to him by the sergeants, always asked, "Has that button been found?" These eight buttons were strewn about him as women sow beans--one to the right and one to the left. His left foot had been struck by a ball in the last campaign, and so he limped and threw it out so far to one side as to almost counteract the efforts of the right foot. The more briskly the chief of police worked his walking apparatus the less progress he made in advance. So while he was getting to the balcony, Ivan Ivanovitch had plenty of time to lose himself in surmises as to why the chief was flourishing his hands so vigorously. This interested him the more, as the matter seemed one of unusual importance; for the chief had on a new dagger.

"Good morning, Peter Feodorovitch!" cried Ivan Ivanovitch, who was, as has already been stated, exceedingly curious, and could not restrain his impatience as the chief of police began to ascend to the balcony, yet never raised his eyes, and kept grumbling at his foot, which could not be persuaded to mount the step at the first attempt.

"I wish my good friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch, a good-day," replied the chief.

"Pray sit down. I see that you are weary, as your lame foot hinders--"

"My foot!" screamed the chief, bestowing upon Ivan Ivanovitch a glance such as a giant might cast upon a pigmy, a pedant upon a dancing-master:

and he stretched out his foot and stamped upon the floor with it. This boldness cost him dear; for his whole body wavered and his nose struck the railing; but the brave preserver of order, with the purpose of making light of it, righted himself immediately, and began to feel in his pocket as if to get his snuff-box. "I must report to you, my dear friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch, that never in all my days have I made such a march. Yes, seriously. For instance, during the campaign of 1807--Ah! I will tell to you how I crawled through the enclosure to see a pretty little German." Here the chief closed one eye and executed a diabolically sly smile.

"Where have you been to-day?" asked Ivan Ivanovitch, wishing to cut the chief short and bring him more speedily to the object of his visit. He would have very much liked to inquire what the chief meant to tell him, but his extensive knowledge of the world showed him the impropriety of such a question; and so he had to keep himself well in hand and await a solution, his heart, meanwhile, beating with unusual force.

"Ah, excuse me! I was going to tell you--where was I?" answered the chief of police. "In the first place, I report that the weather is fine to-day."

At these last words, Ivan Ivanovitch nearly died.

"But permit me," went on the chief. "I have come to you to-day about a very important affair." Here the chief's face and bearing assumed the same careworn aspect with which he had ascended to the balcony.

Ivan Ivanovitch breathed again, and shook as if in a fever, omitting not, as was his habit, to put a question. "What is the important matter? Is it important?"

"Pray judge for yourself; in the first place I venture to report to you, dear friend and benefactor, Ivan Ivanovitch, that you--I beg you to observe that, for my own part, I should have nothing to say; but the rules of government require it--that you have transgressed the rules of propriety."

"What do you mean, Peter Feodorovitch? I don't understand at all."

"Pardon me, Ivan Ivanovitch! how can it be that you do not understand? Your own beast has destroyed an important government document; and you can still say, after that, that you do not understand!"

"What beast?"

"Your own brown sow, with your permission, be it said."

"How can I be responsible? Why did the door-keeper of the court open the door?"

"But, Ivan Ivanovitch, your own brown sow. You must be responsible."

"I am extremely obliged to you for comparing me to a sow."

"But I did not say that, Ivan Ivanovitch! By Heaven! I did not say so! Pray judge from your own clear conscience. It is known to you without doubt, that in accordance with the views of the government, unclean animals are forbidden to roam about the town, particularly in the principal streets. Admit, now, that it is prohibited."

"God knows what you are talking about! A mighty important business that a sow got into the street!"

"Permit me to inform you, Ivan Ivanovitch, permit me, permit me, that this is utterly inadvisable. What is to be done? The authorities command, we must obey. I don't deny that sometimes chickens and geese run about the street, and even about the square, pray observe, chickens and geese; but only last year, I gave orders that pigs and goats were not to be admitted to the public squares, which regulations I directed to be read aloud at the time before all the people."

"No, Peter Feodorovitch, I see nothing here except that you are doing your best to insult me."

"But you cannot say that, my dearest friend and benefactor, that I have tried to insult you. Bethink yourself: I never said a word to you last year when you built a roof a whole foot higher than is allowed by law. On the contrary, I pretended not to have observed it. Believe me, my dearest friend, even now, I would, so to speak--but my duty--in a word, my duty demands that I should have an eye to cleanliness. Just judge for yourself, when suddenly in the principal street--"

"Fine principal streets yours are! Every woman goes there and throws down any rubbish she chooses."

"Permit me to inform you, Ivan Ivanovitch, that it is you who are insulting me. That does sometimes happen, but, as a rule, only besides fences, sheds, or storehouses; but that a filthy sow should intrude herself in the main street, in the square, now is a matter--"

"What sort of a matter? Peter Feodorovitch! surely a sow is one of God's creatures!"

"Agreed. Everybody knows that you are a learned man, that you are acquainted with sciences and various other subjects. I never studied the

sciences: I began to learn to write in my thirteenth year. Of course you know that I was a soldier in the ranks."

"Hm!" said Ivan Ivanovitch.

"Yes," continued the chief of police, "in 1801 I was in the Forty-second Regiment of chasseurs, lieutenant in the fourth company. The commander of our company was, if I may be permitted to mention it, Captain Eremeeff." Thereupon the chief of police thrust his fingers into the snuff-box which Ivan Ivanovitch was holding open, and stirred up the snuff.

Ivan Ivanovitch answered, "Hm!"

"But my duty," went on the chief of police, "is to obey the commands of the authorities. Do you know, Ivan Ivanovitch, that a person who purloins a government document in the court-room incurs capital punishment equally with other criminals?"

"I know it; and, if you like, I can give you lessons. It is so decreed with regard to people, as if you, for instance, were to steal a document; but a sow is an animal, one of God's creatures."

"Certainly; but the law reads, 'Those guilty of theft'--I beg of you to listen most attentively--'Those guilty!' Here is indicated neither race nor sex nor rank: of course an animal can be guilty. You may say what you please; but the animal, until the sentence is pronounced by the court, should be committed to the charge of the police as a transgressor of the law."

"No, Peter Feodorovitch," retorted Ivan Ivanovitch coolly, "that shall not be."

"As you like: only I must carry out the orders of the authorities."

"What are you threatening me with? Probably you want to send that one-armed soldier after her. I shall order the woman who tends the door to drive him off with the poker: he'll get his last arm broken."

"I dare not dispute with you. In case you will not commit the sow to the charge of the police, then do what you please with her: kill her for Christmas, if you like, and make hams of her, or eat her as she is. Only I should like to ask you, in case you make sausages, to send me a couple, such as your Gapka makes so well, of blood and lard. My Agrafena Trofimovna is extremely fond of them."

"I will send you a couple of sausages if you permit."

"I shall be extremely obliged to you, dear friend and benefactor. Now permit me to say one word more. I am commissioned by the judge, as well as by all our acquaintances, so to speak, to effect a reconciliation between you and your friend, Ivan Nikiforovitch."

"What! with that brute! I to be reconciled to that clown! Never! It shall not be, it shall not be!" Ivan Ivanovitch was in a remarkably determined frame of mind.

"As you like," replied the chief of police, treating both nostrils to snuff. "I will not venture to advise you; but permit me to mention--here you live at enmity, and if you make peace..."

But Ivan Ivanovitch began to talk about catching quail, as he usually did when he wanted to put an end to a conversation. So the chief of police was obliged to retire without having achieved any success whatever.

CHAPTER VI

FROM WHICH THE READER CAN EASILY DISCOVER WHAT IS CONTAINED IN IT

In spite of all the judge's efforts to keep the matter secret, all Mirgorod knew by the next day that Ivan Ivanovitch's sow had stolen Ivan Nikiforovitch's petition. The chief of police himself, in a moment of forgetfulness, was the first to betray himself. When Ivan Nikiforovitch was informed of it he said nothing: he merely inquired, "Was it the brown one?"

But Agafya Fedosyevna, who was present, began again to urge on Ivan Nikiforovitch. "What's the matter with you, Ivan Nikiforovitch? People will laugh at you as at a fool if you let it pass. How can you remain a nobleman after that? You will be worse than the old woman who sells the honeycakes with hemp-seed oil you are so fond of."

And the mischief-maker persuaded him. She hunted up somewhere a middle-aged man with dark complexion, spots all over his face, and a dark-blue surtout patched on the elbows, a regular official scribbler. He blacked his boots with tar, wore three pens behind his ear, and a glass vial tied to his buttonhole with a string instead of an ink-bottle: ate as many as nine pies at once, and put the tenth in his pocket, and wrote so many slanders of all sorts on a single sheet of stamped paper that no reader could get through all at one time without interspersing coughs and sneezes. This man laboured, toiled, and wrote, and finally concocted the following document:--

"To the District Judge of Mirgorod, from the noble, Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor.

"In pursuance of my plaint which was presented by me, Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, against the nobleman, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, to which the judge of the Mirgorod district court has exhibited indifference; and the shameless, high-handed deed of the brown sow being kept secret, and coming to my ears from outside parties.

"And the said neglect, plainly malicious, lies incontestably at the judge's door; for the sow is a stupid animal, and therefore unfitted for the theft of papers. From which it plainly appears that the said frequently mentioned sow was not otherwise than instigated to the same by the opponent, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, calling himself a nobleman, and already convicted of theft, conspiracy against life, and desecration of a church. But the said Mirgorod judge, with the partisanship peculiar to him, gave his private consent to this individual; for without such consent the said sow could by no possible means have been admitted to carry off the document; for the judge of the district court of Mirgorod is well provided with servants: it was only necessary to summon a soldier, who is always on duty in the reception-room, and who, although he has but one eye and one somewhat damaged arm, has powers quite adequate to driving out a sow, and to beating it with a stick, from which is credibly evident the criminal neglect of the said Mirgorod judge and the incontestable sharing of the Jew-like spoils therefrom resulting from these mutual conspirators. And the aforesaid robber and nobleman, Ivan Pererepenko, son of Ivan, having disgraced himself, finished his turning on his lathe. Wherefore, I, the noble Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, declare to the said district judge in proper form that if the said brown sow, or the man Pererepenko, be not summoned to the court, and judgment in accordance with justice and my advantage pronounced upon her, then I, Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, shall present a plaint, with observance of all due formalities, against the said district judge for his illegal partisanship to the superior courts.

"Ivan Dovgotchkun, son of Nikifor, noble of the Mirgorod District."

This petition produced its effect. The judge was a man of timid disposition, as all good people generally are. He betook himself to the secretary. But the secretary emitted from his lips a thick "Hm," and exhibited on his countenance that indifferent and diabolically equivocal expression which Satan alone assumes when he sees his victim hastening to his feet. One resource remained to him, to reconcile the two friends. But how to set about it, when all attempts up to that time had been so unsuccessful? Nevertheless, it was decided to make another effort; but Ivan Ivanovitch declared outright that he would not hear of it, and even flew into a violent passion; whilst Ivan Nikiforovitch, in lieu of an

answer, turned his back and would not utter a word.

Then the case went on with the unusual promptness upon which courts usually pride themselves. Documents were dated, labelled, numbered, sewed together, registered all in one day, and the matter laid on the shelf, where it continued to lie, for one, two, or three years. Many brides were married; a new street was laid out in Mirgorod; one of the judge's double teeth fell out and two of his eye-teeth; more children than ever ran about Ivan Ivanovitch's yard; Ivan Nikiforovitch, as a reproof to Ivan Ivanovitch, constructed a new goose-shed, although a little farther back than the first, and built himself completely off from his neighbour, so that these worthy people hardly ever beheld each other's faces; but still the case lay in the cabinet, which had become marbled with ink-pots.

In the meantime a very important event for all Mirgorod had taken place. The chief of police had given a reception. Whence shall I obtain the brush and colours to depict this varied gathering and magnificent feast? Take your watch, open it, and look what is going on inside. A fearful confusion, is it not? Now, imagine almost the same, if not a greater, number of wheels standing in the chief of police's courtyard. How many carriages and waggons were there! One was wide behind and narrow in front; another narrow behind and wide in front. One was a carriage and a waggon combined; another neither a carriage nor a waggon. One resembled a huge hayrick or a fat merchant's wife; another a dilapidated Jew or a skeleton not quite freed from the skin. One was a perfect pipe with long stem in profile; another, resembling nothing whatever, suggested some strange, shapeless, fantastic object. In the midst of this chaos of wheels rose coaches with windows like those of a room. The drivers, in grey Cossack coats, gaberdines, and white hare-skin coats, sheepskin hats and caps of various patterns, and with pipes in their hands, drove the unharnessed horses through the yard.

What a reception the chief of police gave! Permit me to run through the list of those who were there: Taras Tarasovitch, Evpl Akinfovitch, Evtikhiy Evtikhievitch, Ivan Ivanovitch--not that Ivan Ivanovitch but another--Gabba Bavrilonovitch, our Ivan Ivanovitch, Elevferiy Elevferievitch, Makar Nazarevitch, Thoma Grigorovitch--I can say no more: my powers fail me, my hand stops writing. And how many ladies were there! dark and fair, tall and short, some fat like Ivan Nikiforovitch, and some so thin that it seemed as though each one might hide herself in the scabbard of the chief's sword. What head-dresses! what costumes! red, yellow, coffee-colour, green, blue, new, turned, re-made dresses, ribbons, reticules. Farewell, poor eyes! you will never be good for anything any more after such a spectacle. And how long the table was drawn out! and how all talked! and what a noise they made! What is a mill with its driving-wheel, stones, beams, hammers, wheels, in comparison with this? I cannot tell you exactly what they talked about,

but presumably of many agreeable and useful things, such as the weather, dogs, wheat, caps, and dice. At length Ivan Ivanovitch--not our Ivan Ivanovitch, but the other, who had but one eye--said, "It strikes me as strange that my right eye," this one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch always spoke sarcastically about himself, "does not see Ivan Nikiforovitch, Gospodin Dovgotchkun."

"He would not come," said the chief of police.

"Why not?"

"It's two years now, glory to God! since they quarrelled; that is, Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch; and where one goes, the other will not go."

"You don't say so!" Thereupon one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch raised his eye and clasped his hands. "Well, if people with good eyes cannot live in peace, how am I to live amicably, with my bad one?"

At these words they all laughed at the tops of their voices. Every one liked one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch, because he cracked jokes in that style. A tall, thin man in a frieze coat, with a plaster on his nose, who up to this time had sat in the corner, and never once altered the expression of his face, even when a fly lighted on his nose, rose from his seat, and approached nearer to the crowd which surrounded one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch. "Listen," said Ivan Ivanovitch, when he perceived that quite a throng had collected about him; "suppose we make peace between our friends. Ivan Ivanovitch is talking with the women and girls; let us send quietly for Ivan Nikiforovitch and bring them together."

Ivan Ivanovitch's proposal was unanimously agreed to; and it was decided to send at once to Ivan Nikiforovitch's house, and beg him, at any rate, to come to the chief of police's for dinner. But the difficult question as to who was to be intrusted with this weighty commission rendered all thoughtful. They debated long as to who was the most expert in diplomatic matters. At length it was unanimously agreed to depute Anton Prokofievitch to do this business.

But it is necessary, first of all, to make the reader somewhat acquainted with this noteworthy person. Anton Prokofievitch was a truly good man, in the fullest meaning of the term. If any one in Mirgorod gave him a neckerchief or underclothes, he returned thanks; if any one gave him a fillip on the nose, he returned thanks too. If he was asked, "Why, Anton Prokofievitch, do you wear a light brown coat with blue sleeves?" he generally replied, "Ah, you haven't one like it! Wait a bit, it will soon fade and will be alike all over." And, in point of fact, the blue cloth, from the effects of the sun, began to turn cinnamon colour, and became of the same tint as the rest of the coat.

But the strange part of it was that Anton Prokofievitch had a habit of wearing woollen clothing in summer and nankeen in winter.

Anton Prokofievitch had no house of his own. He used to have one on the outskirts of the town; but he sold it, and with the purchase-money bought a team of brown horses and a little carriage in which he drove about to stay with the squires. But as the horses were a deal of trouble and money was required for oats, Anton Prokofievitch bartered them for a violin and a housemaid, with twenty-five paper rubles to boot. Afterwards Anton Prokofievitch sold the violin, and exchanged the girl for a morocco and gold tobacco-pouch; now he has such a tobacco-pouch as no one else has. As a result of this luxury, he can no longer go about among the country houses, but has to remain in the town and pass the night at different houses, especially of those gentlemen who take pleasure in tapping him on the nose. Anton Prokofievitch is very fond of good eating, and plays a good game at cards. Obeying orders always was his forte; so, taking his hat and cane, he set out at once on his errand.

But, as he walked along, he began to ponder in what manner he should contrive to induce Ivan Nikiforovitch to come to the assembly. The unbending character of the latter, who was otherwise a worthy man, rendered the undertaking almost hopeless. How, indeed, was he to persuade him to come, when even rising from his bed cost him so great an effort? But supposing that he did rise, how could he get him to come, where, as he doubtless knew, his irreconcilable enemy already was? The more Anton Prokofievitch reflected, the more difficulties he perceived. The day was sultry, the sun beat down, the perspiration poured from him in streams. Anton Prokofievitch was a tolerably sharp man in many respects though they did tap him on the nose. In bartering, however, he was not fortunate. He knew very well when to play the fool, and sometimes contrived to turn things to his own profit amid circumstances and surroundings from which a wise man could rarely escape without loss.

His ingenious mind had contrived a means of persuading Ivan Nikiforovitch; and he was proceeding bravely to face everything when an unexpected occurrence somewhat disturbed his equanimity. There is no harm, at this point, in admitting to the reader that, among other things, Anton Prokofievitch was the owner of a pair of trousers of such singular properties that whenever he put them on the dogs always bit his calves. Unfortunately, he had donned this particular pair of trousers; and he had hardly given himself up to meditation before a fearful barking on all sides saluted his ears. Anton Prokofievitch raised such a yell, no one could scream louder than he, that not only did the well-known woman and the occupant of the endless coat rush out to meet him, but even the small boys from Ivan Ivanovitch's yard. But although the dogs succeeded in tasting only one of his calves, this sensibility diminished his courage, and he entered the porch with a certain amount

of timidity.

CHAPTER VII

HOW A RECONCILIATION WAS SOUGHT TO BE EFFECTED AND A LAW SUIT ENSUED

"Ah! how do you do? Why do you irritate the dogs?" said Ivan Nikiforovitch, on perceiving Anton Prokofievitch; for no one spoke otherwise than jestingly with Anton Prokofievitch.

"Hang them! who's been irritating them?" retorted Anton Prokofievitch.

"You have!"

"By Heavens, no! You are invited to dinner by Peter Feodorovitch."

"Hm!"

"He invited you in a more pressing manner than I can tell you. 'Why,' says he, 'does Ivan Nikiforovitch shun me like an enemy? He never comes round to have a chat, or make a call.'"

Ivan Nikiforovitch stroked his beard.

"'If,' says he, 'Ivan Nikiforovitch does not come now, I shall not know what to think: surely, he must have some design against me. Pray, Anton Prokofievitch, persuade Ivan Nikiforovitch!' Come, Ivan Nikiforovitch, let us go! a very choice company is already met there."

Ivan Nikiforovitch began to look at a cock, which was perched on the roof, crowing with all its might.

"If you only knew, Ivan Nikiforovitch," pursued the zealous ambassador, "what fresh sturgeon and caviare Peter Feodorovitch has had sent to him!" Whereupon Ivan Nikiforovitch turned his head and began to listen attentively. This encouraged the messenger. "Come quickly: Thoma Grigorovitch is there too. Why don't you come?" he added, seeing that Ivan Nikiforovitch still lay in the same position. "Shall we go, or not?"

"I won't!"

This "I won't" startled Anton Prokofievitch. He had fancied that his alluring representations had quite moved this very worthy man; but instead, he heard that decisive "I won't."

"Why won't you?" he asked, with a vexation which he very rarely exhibited, even when they put burning paper on his head, a trick which the judge and the chief of police were particularly fond of indulging in.

Ivan Nikiforovitch took a pinch of snuff.

"Just as you like, Ivan Nikiforovitch. I do not know what detains you."

"Why don't I go?" said Ivan Nikiforovitch at length: "because that brigand will be there!" This was his ordinary way of alluding to Ivan Ivanovitch. "Just God! and is it long?"

"He will not be there, he will not be there! May the lightning kill me on the spot!" returned Anton Prokofievitch, who was ready to perjure himself ten times in an hour. "Come along, Ivan Nikiforovitch!"

"You lie, Anton Prokofievitch! he is there!"

"By Heaven, by Heaven, he's not! May I never stir from this place if he's there! Now, just think for yourself, what object have I in lying? May my hands and feet wither!--What, don't you believe me now? May I perish right here in your presence! Don't you believe me yet?"

Ivan Nikiforovitch was entirely reassured by these asseverations, and ordered his valet, in the boundless coat, to fetch his trousers and nankeen spencer.

To describe how Ivan Nikiforovitch put on his trousers, how they wound his neckerchief about his neck, and finally dragged on his spencer, which burst under the left sleeve, would be quite superfluous. Suffice it to say, that during the whole of the time he preserved a becoming calmness of demeanour, and answered not a word to Anton Prokofievitch's proposition to exchange something for his Turkish tobacco-pouch.

Meanwhile, the assembly awaited with impatience the decisive moment when Ivan Nikiforovitch should make his appearance and at length comply with the general desire that these worthy people should be reconciled to each other. Many were almost convinced that Ivan Nikiforovitch would not come. Even the chief of police offered to bet with one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch that he would not come; and only desisted when one-eyed Ivan Ivanovitch demanded that he should wager his lame foot against his own bad eye, at which the chief of police was greatly offended, and the company enjoyed a quiet laugh. No one had yet sat down to the table, although it was long past two o'clock, an hour before which in Mirgorod, even on ceremonial occasions, every one had already dined.

No sooner did Anton Prokofievitch show himself in the doorway, then

he was instantly surrounded. Anton Prokofievitch, in answer to all inquiries, shouted the all-decisive words, "He will not come!" No sooner had he uttered them than a hailstorm of reproaches, scoldings, and, possibly, even fillips were about to descend upon his head for the ill success of his mission, when all at once the door opened, and--Ivan Nikiforovitch entered.

If Satan himself or a corpse had appeared, it would not have caused such consternation amongst the company as Ivan Nikiforovitch's unexpected arrival created. But Anton Prokofievitch only went off into a fit of laughter, and held his sides with delight at having played such a joke upon the company.

At all events, it was almost past the belief of all that Ivan Nikiforovitch could, in so brief a space of time, have attired himself like a respectable gentleman. Ivan Ivanovitch was not there at the moment: he had stepped out somewhere. Recovering from their amazement, the guests expressed an interest in Ivan Nikiforovitch's health, and their pleasure at his increase in breadth. Ivan Nikiforovitch kissed every one, and said, "Very much obliged!"

Meantime, the fragrance of the beet-soup was wafted through the apartment, and tickled the nostrils of the hungry guests very agreeably. All rushed headlong to table. The line of ladies, loquacious and silent, thin and stout, swept on, and the long table soon glittered with all the hues of the rainbow. I will not describe the courses: I will make no mention of the curd dumplings with sour cream, nor of the dish of pig's fry that was served with the soup, nor of the turkey with plums and raisins, nor of the dish which greatly resembled in appearance a boot soaked in kvas, nor of the sauce, which is the swan's song of the old-fashioned cook, nor of that other dish which was brought in all enveloped in the flames of spirit, and amused as well as frightened the ladies extremely. I will say nothing of these dishes, because I like to eat them better than to spend many words in discussing them.

Ivan Ivanovitch was exceedingly pleased with the fish dressed with horse-radish. He devoted himself especially to this useful and nourishing preparation. Picking out all the fine bones from the fish, he laid them on his plate; and happening to glance across the table--Heavenly Creator; but this was strange! Opposite him sat Ivan Nikiforovitch.

At the very same instant Ivan Nikiforovitch glanced up also--No, I can do no more--Give me a fresh pen with a fine point for this picture! mine is flabby. Their faces seemed to turn to stone whilst still retaining their defiant expression. Each beheld a long familiar face, to which it should have seemed the most natural of things to step up, involuntarily, as to an unexpected friend, and offer a snuff-box, with the words, "Do

me the favour," or "Dare I beg you to do me the favour?" Instead of this, that face was terrible as a forerunner of evil. The perspiration poured in streams from Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch.

All the guests at the table grew dumb with attention, and never once took their eyes off the former friends. The ladies, who had been busy up to that time on a sufficiently interesting discussion as to the preparation of capons, suddenly cut their conversation short. All was silence. It was a picture worthy of the brush of a great artist.

At length Ivan Ivanovitch pulled out his handkerchief and began to blow his nose; whilst Ivan Nikiforovitch glanced about and his eye rested on the open door. The chief of police at once perceived this movement, and ordered the door to be fastened. Then both of the friends began to eat, and never once glanced at each other again.

As soon as dinner was over, the two former friends both rose from their seats, and began to look for their hats, with a view to departure. Then the chief beckoned; and Ivan Ivanovitch--not our Ivan Ivanovitch, but the other with the one eye--got behind Ivan Nikiforovitch, and the chief stepped behind Ivan Ivanovitch, and the two began to drag them backwards, in order to bring them together, and not release them till they had shaken hands with each other. Ivan Ivanovitch, the one-eyed, pushed Ivan Nikiforovitch, with tolerable success, towards the spot where stood Ivan Ivanovitch. But the chief of police directed his course too much to one side, because he could not steer himself with his refractory leg, which obeyed no orders whatever on this occasion, and, as if with malice and aforethought, swung itself uncommonly far, and in quite the contrary direction, possibly from the fact that there had been an unusual amount of fruit wine after dinner, so that Ivan Ivanovitch fell over a lady in a red gown, who had thrust herself into the very midst, out of curiosity.

Such an omen forboded no good. Nevertheless, the judge, in order to set things to rights, took the chief of police's place, and, sweeping all the snuff from his upper lip with his nose, pushed Ivan Ivanovitch in the opposite direction. In Mirgorod this is the usual manner of effecting a reconciliation: it somewhat resembles a game of ball. As soon as the judge pushed Ivan Ivanovitch, Ivan Ivanovitch with the one eye exerted all his strength, and pushed Ivan Nikiforovitch, from whom the perspiration streamed like rain-water from a roof. In spite of the fact that the friends resisted to the best of their ability, they were nevertheless brought together, for the two chief movers received reinforcements from the ranks of their guests.

Then they were closely surrounded on all sides, not to be released until they had decided to give one another their hands. "God be with you, Ivan Nikiforovitch and Ivan Ivanovitch! declare upon your honour now, that

what you quarrelled about were mere trifles, were they not? Are you not ashamed of yourselves before people and before God?"

"I do not know," said Ivan Nikiforovitch, panting with fatigue, though it is to be observed that he was not at all disinclined to a reconciliation, "I do not know what I did to Ivan Ivanovitch; but why did he destroy my coop and plot against my life?"

"I am innocent of any evil designs!" said Ivan Ivanovitch, never looking at Ivan Nikiforovitch. "I swear before God and before you, honourable noblemen, I did nothing to my enemy! Why does he calumniate me and insult my rank and family?"

"How have I insulted you, Ivan Ivanovitch?" said Ivan Nikiforovitch. One moment more of explanation, and the long enmity would have been extinguished. Ivan Nikiforovitch was already feeling in his pocket for his snuff-box, and was about to say, "Do me the favour."

"Is it not an insult," answered Ivan Ivanovitch, without raising his eyes, "when you, my dear sir, insulted my honour and my family with a word which it is improper to repeat here?"

"Permit me to observe, in a friendly manner, Ivan Ivanovitch," here Ivan Nikiforovitch touched Ivan Ivanovitch's button with his finger, which clearly indicated the disposition of his mind, "that you took offence, the deuce only knows at what, because I called you a 'goose'--"

It occurred to Ivan Nikiforovitch that he had made a mistake in uttering that word; but it was too late: the word was said. Everything went to the winds. It, on the utterance of this word without witnesses, Ivan Ivanovitch lost control of himself and flew into such a passion as God preserve us from beholding any man in, what was to be expected now? I put it to you, dear readers, what was to be expected now, when the fatal word was uttered in an assemblage of persons among whom were ladies, in whose presence Ivan Ivanovitch liked to be particularly polite? If Ivan Nikiforovitch had set to work in any other manner, if he had only said bird and not goose, it might still have been arranged, but all was at an end.

He gave one look at Ivan Nikiforovitch, but such a look! If that look had possessed active power, then it would have turned Ivan Nikiforovitch into dust. The guests understood the look and hastened to separate them. And this man, the very model of gentleness, who never let a single poor woman go by without interrogating her, rushed out in a fearful rage. Such violent storms do passions produce!

For a whole month nothing was heard of Ivan Ivanovitch. He shut himself up at home. His ancestral chest was opened, and from it were taken

silver rubles, his grandfather's old silver rubles! And these rubles passed into the ink-stained hands of legal advisers. The case was sent up to the higher court; and when Ivan Ivanovitch received the joyful news that it would be decided on the morrow, then only did he look out upon the world and resolve to emerge from his house. Alas! from that time forth the council gave notice day by day that the case would be finished on the morrow, for the space of ten years.

Five years ago, I passed through the town of Mirgorod. I came at a bad time. It was autumn, with its damp, melancholy weather, mud and mists. An unnatural verdure, the result of incessant rains, covered with a watery network the fields and meadows, to which it is as well suited as youthful pranks to an old man, or roses to an old woman. The weather made a deep impression on me at the time: when it was dull, I was dull; but in spite of this, when I came to pass through Mirgorod, my heart beat violently. God, what reminiscences! I had not seen Mirgorod for twenty years. Here had lived, in touching friendship, two inseparable friends. And how many prominent people had died! Judge Demyan Demyanovitch was already gone: Ivan Ivanovitch, with the one eye, had long ceased to live.

I entered the main street. All about stood poles with bundles of straw on top: some alterations were in progress. Several dwellings had been removed. The remnants of board and wattled fences projected sadly here and there. It was a festival day. I ordered my basket chaise to stop in front of the church, and entered softly that no one might turn round. To tell the truth, there was no need of this: the church was almost empty; there were very few people; it was evident that even the most pious feared the mud. The candles seemed strangely unpleasant in that gloomy, or rather sickly, light. The dim vestibule was melancholy; the long windows, with their circular panes, were bedewed with tears of rain. I retired into the vestibule, and addressing a respectable old man, with greyish hair, said, "May I inquire if Ivan Nikiforovitch is still living?"

At that moment the lamp before the holy picture burned up more brightly and the light fell directly upon the face of my companion. What was my surprise, on looking more closely, to behold features with which I was acquainted! It was Ivan Nikiforovitch himself! But how he had changed!

"Are you well, Ivan Nikiforovitch? How old you have grown!"

"Yes, I have grown old. I have just come from Poltava to-day," answered Ivan Nikiforovitch.

"You don't say so! you have been to Poltava in such bad weather?"

"What was to be done? that lawsuit--"

At this I sighed involuntarily.

Ivan Nikiforovitch observed my sigh, and said, "Do not be troubled: I have reliable information that the case will be decided next week, and in my favour."

I shrugged my shoulders, and went to seek news of Ivan Ivanovitch.

"Ivan Ivanovitch is here," some one said to me, "in the choir."

I saw a gaunt form. Was that Ivan Ivanovitch? His face was covered with wrinkles, his hair was perfectly white; but the pelisse was the same as ever. After the first greetings were over, Ivan Ivanovitch, turning to me with a joyful smile which always became his funnel-shaped face, said, "Have you been told the good news?"

"What news?" I inquired.

"My case is to be decided to-morrow without fail: the court has announced it decisively."

I sighed more deeply than before, made haste to take my leave, for I was bound on very important business, and seated myself in my kibitka.

The lean nags known in Mirgorod as post-horses started, producing with their hoofs, which were buried in a grey mass of mud, a sound very displeasing to the ear. The rain poured in torrents upon the Jew seated on the box, covered with a rug. The dampness penetrated through and through me. The gloomy barrier with a sentry-box, in which an old soldier was repairing his weapons, was passed slowly. Again the same fields, in some places black where they had been dug up, in others of a greenish hue; wet daws and crows; monotonous rain; a tearful sky, without one gleam of light!... It is gloomy in this world, gentlemen!



THE GENTLEMAN FROM SAN FRANCISCO

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Gentleman from San Francisco, and Other Stories*, by Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin

"Woe to thee, Babylon, that mighty city!"
Apocalypse.

The gentleman from San Francisco--nobody either in Capri or Naples ever remembered his name--was setting out with his wife and daughter for the Old World, to spend there two years of pleasure.

He was fully convinced of his right to rest, to enjoy long and comfortable travels, and so forth. Because, in the first place he was rich, and in the second place, notwithstanding his fifty-eight years, he was just starting to live. Up to the present he had not lived, but only existed; quite well, it is true, yet with all his hopes on the future. He had worked incessantly--and the Chinamen whom he employed by the thousand in his factories knew what that meant. Now at last he realized that a great deal had been accomplished, and that he had almost reached the level of those whom he had taken as his ideals, so he made up his mind to pause for a breathing space. Men of his class usually began their enjoyments with a trip to Europe, India, Egypt. He decided to do the same. He wished naturally to reward himself in the first place for all his years of toil, but he was quite glad that his wife and daughter should also share in his pleasures. True, his wife was not distinguished by any marked susceptibilities, but then elderly American women are all passionate travellers. As for his daughter, a girl no longer young and somewhat delicate, travel was really necessary for her: apart from the question of health, do not happy meetings often take place in the course of travel? One may find one's self sitting next to a multimillionaire at table, or examining frescoes side by side with him.

The itinerary planned by the Gentleman of San Francisco was extensive. In December and January he hoped to enjoy the sun of southern Italy, the monuments of antiquity, the tarantella, the serenades of vagrant minstrels, and, finally, that which men of his age are most susceptible to, the love of quite young Neapolitan girls, even when the love is not altogether disinterestedly given. Carnival he thought of spending in Nice, in Monte Carlo, where at that season gathers the most select society, the precise society on which depend all the blessings of civilization--the fashion in evening dress, the stability of thrones, the declaration of wars, the prosperity of hotels; where some devote themselves passionately to automobile and boat races, others to roulette, others to what is called flirtation, and others to the shooting of pigeons which beautifully soar from their traps over emerald lawns, against a background of forget-me-not sea, instantly to fall,

hitting the ground in little white heaps. The beginning of March he wished to devote to Florence, Passion Week in Rome, to hear the music of the Miserere; his plans also included Venice, Paris, bull-fights in Seville, bathing in the British Isles; then Athens, Constantinople, Egypt, even Japan ... certainly on his way home... . And everything at the outset went splendidly.

It was the end of November. Practically all the way to Gibraltar the voyage passed in icy darkness, varied by storms of wet snow. Yet the ship travelled well, even without much rolling. The passengers on board were many, and all people of some importance. The boat, the famous _Atlantis_, resembled a most expensive European hotel with all modern equipments: a night refreshment bar, Turkish baths, a newspaper printed on board; so that the days aboard the liner passed in the most select manner. The passengers rose early, to the sound of bugles sounding shrilly through the corridors in that grey twilit hour, when day was breaking slowly and sullenly over the grey-green, watery desert, which rolled heavily in the fog. Clad in their flannel pyjamas, the gentlemen took coffee, chocolate, or cocoa, then seated themselves in marble baths, did exercises, thereby whetting their appetite and their sense of well-being, made their toilet for the day, and proceeded to breakfast. Till eleven o'clock they were supposed to stroll cheerfully on deck, breathing the cold freshness of the ocean; or they played table-tennis or other games, that they might have an appetite for their eleven o'clock refreshment of sandwiches and bouillon; after which they read their newspaper with pleasure, and calmly awaited luncheon--which was a still more varied and nourishing meal than breakfast. The two hours which followed luncheon were devoted to rest. All the decks were crowded with lounge chairs on which lay passengers wrapped in plaids, looking at the mist-heavy sky or the foamy hillocks which flashed behind the bows, and dozing sweetly. Till five o'clock, when, refreshed and lively, they were treated to strong, fragrant tea and sweet cakes. At seven bugle-calls announced a dinner of nine courses. And now the Gentleman from San Francisco, rubbing his hands in a rising flush of vital forces, hastened to his state cabin to dress.

In the evening, the tiers of the _Atlantis_ yawned in the darkness as with innumerable fiery eyes, and a multitude of servants in the kitchens, sculleries, wine-cellars, worked with a special frenzy. The ocean heaving beyond was terrible, but no one thought of it, firmly believing in the captain's power over it. The captain was a ginger-haired man of monstrous size and weight, apparently always torpid, who looked in his uniform with broad gold stripes very like a huge idol, and who rarely emerged from his mysterious chambers to show himself to the passengers. Every minute the siren howled from the bows with hellish moroseness, and screamed with fury, but few diners heard it--it was drowned by the sounds of an excellent string band, exquisitely and untiringly playing in the huge two-tiered hall that was

decorated with marble and covered with velvet carpets, flooded with feasts of light from crystal chandeliers and gilded girandoles, and crowded with ladies in bare shoulders and jewels, with men in dinner-jackets, elegant waiters and respectful _maîtres d'hôtel_, one of whom, he who took the wine-orders only, wore a chain round his neck like a lord mayor. Dinner-jacket and perfect linen made the Gentleman from San Francisco look much younger. Dry, of small stature, badly built but strongly made, polished to a glow and in due measure animated, he sat in the golden-pearly radiance of this palace, with a bottle of amber Johannisberg at his hand, and glasses, large and small, of delicate crystal, and a curly bunch of fresh hyacinths. There was something Mongolian in his yellowish face with its trimmed silvery moustache, large teeth blazing with gold, and strong bald head blazing like old ivory. Richly dressed, but in keeping with her age, sat his wife, a big, broad, quiet woman. Intricately, but lightly and transparently dressed, with an innocent immodesty, sat his daughter, tall, slim, her magnificent hair splendidly done, her breath fragrant with violet cachous, and the tenderest little rosy moles showing near her lip and between her bare, slightly powdered shoulder blades. The dinner lasted two whole hours, to be followed by dancing in the ball-room, whence the men, including, of course, the Gentleman from San Francisco, proceeded to the bar; there, with their feet cocked up on the tables, they settled the destinies of nations in the course of their political and stock-exchange conversations, smoking meanwhile Havana cigars and drinking liqueurs till they were crimson in the face, waited on all the while by negroes in red jackets with eyes like peeled, hard-boiled eggs. Outside, the ocean heaved in black mountains; the snow-storm hissed furiously in the clogged cordage; the steamer trembled in every fibre as she surmounted these watery hills and struggled with the storm, ploughing through the moving masses which every now and then reared in front of her, foam-crested. The siren, choked by the fog, groaned in mortal anguish. The watchmen in the look-out towers froze with cold, and went mad with their super-human straining of attention. As the gloomy and sultry depths of the inferno, as the ninth circle, was the submerged womb of the steamer, where gigantic furnaces roared and dully giggled, devouring with their red-hot maws mountains of coal cast hoarsely in by men naked to the waist, bathed in their own corrosive dirty sweat, and lurid with the purple-red reflection of flame. But in the refreshment bar men jauntily put their feet up on the tables, showing their patent-leather pumps, and sipped cognac or other liqueurs, and swam in waves of fragrant smoke as they chatted in well-bred manner. In the dancing hall light and warmth and joy were poured over everything; couples turned in the waltz or writhed in the tango, while the music insistently, shamelessly, delightfully, with sadness entreated for one, only one thing, one and the same thing all the time. Amongst this resplendent crowd was an ambassador, a little dry modest old man; a great millionaire, clean-shaven, tall, of an indefinite age, looking like a prelate in his old-fashioned dress-coat; also a famous Spanish

author, and an international beauty already the least bit faded, of unenviable reputation; finally an exquisite loving couple, whom everybody watched curiously because of their unconcealed happiness: _he_ danced only with _her_, and sang, with great skill, only to _her_ accompaniment, and everything about them seemed so charming!--and only the captain knew that this couple had been engaged by the steamship company to play at love for a good salary, and that they had been sailing for a long time, now on one liner, now on another.

At Gibraltar the sun gladdened them all: it was like early spring. A new passenger appeared on board, arousing general interest. He was a hereditary prince of a certain Asiatic state, travelling incognito: a small man, as if all made of wood, though his movements were alert; broad-faced, in gold-rimmed glasses, a little unpleasant because of his large black moustache which was sparse and transparent like that of a corpse; but on the whole inoffensive, simple, modest. In the Mediterranean they met once more the breath of winter. Waves, large and florid as the tail of a peacock, waves with snow-white crests heaved under the impulse of the tramontane wind, and came merrily, madly rushing towards the ship, in the bright lustre of a perfectly clear sky. The next day the sky began to pale, the horizon grew dim, land was approaching: Ischia, Capri could be seen through the glasses, then Naples herself, looking like pieces of sugar strewn at the foot of some dove-coloured mass; whilst beyond, vague and deadly white with snow, a range of distant mountains. The decks were crowded. Many ladies and gentlemen were putting on light fur-trimmed coats. Noiseless Chinese servant boys, bandy-legged, with pitch-black plaits hanging down to their heels, and with girlish thick eyebrows, unobtrusively came and went, carrying up the stairways plaids, canes, valises, hand-bags of crocodile leather, and never speaking above a whisper. The daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco stood side by side with the prince, who, by a happy circumstance, had been introduced to her the previous evening. She had the air of one looking fixedly into the distance towards something which he was pointing out to her, and which he was explaining hurriedly, in a low voice. Owing to his size, he looked amongst the rest like a boy. Altogether he was not handsome, rather queer, with his spectacles, bowler hat, and English coat, and then the hair of his sparse moustache just like horse-hair, and the swarthy, thin skin of his face seeming stretched over his features and slightly varnished. But the girl listened to him, and was so excited that she did not know what he was saying. Her heart beat with incomprehensible rapture because of him, because he was standing next to her and talking to her, to her alone. Everything, everything about him was so unusual--his dry hands, his clean skin under which flowed ancient, royal blood, even his plain, but somehow particularly tidy European dress; everything was invested with an indefinable glamour, with all that was calculated to enthrall a young woman. The Gentleman from San Francisco, wearing for his part a silk hat and grey spats over patent-leather

shoes, kept eyeing the famous beauty who stood near him, a tall, wonderful figure, blonde, with her eyes painted according to the latest Parisian fashion, holding on a silver chain a tiny, cringing, hairless little dog, to which she was addressing herself all the time. And the daughter, feeling some vague embarrassment, tried not to notice her father.

Like all Americans, he was very liberal with his money when travelling. And like all of them, he believed in the full sincerity and good-will of those who brought his food and drinks, served him from morn till night, anticipated his smallest desire, watched over his cleanliness and rest, carried his things, called the porters, conveyed his trunks to the hotels. So it was everywhere, so it was during the voyage, so it ought to be in Naples. Naples grew and drew nearer. The brass band, shining with the brass of their instruments, had already assembled on deck. Suddenly they deafened everybody with the strains of their triumphant rag-time. The giant captain appeared in full uniform on the bridge, and like a benign pagan idol waved his hands to the passengers in a gesture of welcome. And to the Gentleman from San Francisco, as well as to every other passenger, it seemed as if for him alone was thundered forth that rag-time march, so greatly beloved by proud America; for him alone the Captain's hand waved, welcoming him on his safe arrival. Then, when at last the _Atlantis_ entered port and veered her many-tiered mass against the quay that was crowded with expectant people, when the gangways began their rattling--ah, then what a lot of porters and their assistants in caps with golden galloons, what a lot of all sorts of commissionaires, whistling boys, and sturdy ragamuffins with packs of postcards in their hands rushed to meet the Gentleman from San Francisco with offers of their services! With what amiable contempt he grinned at those ragamuffins as he walked to the automobile of the very same hotel at which the prince would probably put up, and calmly muttered between his teeth, now in English, now in Italian--"Go away! Via!"

Life at Naples started immediately in the set routine. Early in the morning, breakfast in a gloomy dining-room with a draughty damp wind blowing in from the windows that opened on to a little stony garden: a cloudy, unpromising day, and a crowd of guides at the doors of the vestibule. Then the first smiles of a warm, pinky-coloured sun, and from the high, overhanging balcony a view of Vesuvius, bathed to the feet in the radiant vapours of the morning sky, while beyond, over the silvery-pearly ripple of the bay, the subtle outline of Capri upon the horizon! Then nearer, tiny donkeys running in two-wheeled buggies away below on the sticky embankment, and detachments of tiny soldiers marching off with cheerful and defiant music.

After this a walk to the taxi-stand, and a slow drive along crowded, narrow, damp corridors of streets, between high, many-windowed houses. Visits to deadly-clean museums, smoothly and pleasantly lighted, but

monotonously, as if from the reflection of snow. Or visits to churches, cold, smelling of wax, and always the same thing: a majestic portal, curtained with a heavy leather curtain: inside, a huge emptiness, silence, lonely little flames of clustered candles ruddying the depths of the interior on some altar decorated with ribbon: a forlorn old woman amid dark benches, slippery gravestones under one's feet, and somebody's infallibly famous "Descent from the Cross." Luncheon at one o'clock on San Martino, where quite a number of the very selectest people gather about midday, and where once the daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco almost became ill with joy, fancying she saw the prince sitting in the hall, although she knew from the newspapers that he had gone to Rome for a time. At five o'clock, tea in the hotel, in the smart salon where it was so warm, with the deep carpets and blazing fires. After which the thought of dinner--and again the powerful commanding voice of the gong heard over all the floors, and again strings of bare-shouldered ladies rustling with their silks on the staircases and reflecting themselves in the mirrors, again the wide-flung, hospitable, palatial dining-room, the red jackets of musicians on the platform, the black flock of waiters around the _maître d'hôtel_, who with extraordinary skill was pouring out a thick, roseate soup into soup-plates. The dinners, as usual, were the crowning event of the day. Every one dressed as if for a wedding, and so abundant were the dishes, the wines, the table-waters, sweetmeats, and fruit, that at about eleven o'clock in the evening the chamber-maids would take to every room rubber hot-water bottles, to warm the stomachs of those who had dined.

None the less, December of that year was not a success for Naples. The porters and secretaries were abashed if spoken to about the weather, only guiltily lifting their shoulders and murmuring that they could not possibly remember such a season; although this was not the first year they had had to make such murmurs, or to hint that "everywhere something terrible is happening." ... Unprecedented rains and storms on the Riviera, snow in Athens, Etna also piled with snow and glowing red at night; tourists fleeing from the cold of Palermo.... The morning sun daily deceived the Neapolitans. The sky invariably grew grey towards midday, and fine rain began to fall, falling thicker and colder. The palms of the hotel approach glistened like wet tin; the city seemed peculiarly dirty and narrow, the museums excessively dull; the cigar-ends of the fat cab-men, whose rubber rain-capes flapped like wings in the wind, seemed insufferably stinking, the energetic cracking of whips over the ears of thin-necked horses sounded altogether false, and the clack of the shoes of the signorini who cleaned the tram-lines quite horrible, while the women, walking through the mud, with their black heads uncovered in the rain, seemed disgustingly short-legged: not to mention the stench and dampness of foul fish which drifted from the quay where the sea was foaming. The gentleman and lady from San Francisco began to bicker in the mornings; their daughter went about pale and head-achey, and then roused up again, went into raptures over

everything, and was lovely, charming. Charming were those tender, complicated feelings which had been aroused in her by the meeting with the plain little man in whose veins ran such special blood. But after all, does it matter _what_ awakens a maiden soul--whether it is money, fame, or noble birth?... Everybody declared that in Sorrento, or in Capri, it was quite different. There it was warmer, sunnier, the lemon-trees were in bloom, the morals were purer, the wine unadulterated. So behold, the family from San Francisco decided to go with all their trunks to Capri, after which they would return and settle down in Sorrento: when they had seen Capri, trodden the stones where stood Tiberius' palaces, visited the famous caves of the Blue Grotto, and listened to the pipers from Abruzzi, who wander about the isle during the month of the Nativity, singing the praises of the Virgin.

On the day of departure--a very memorable day for the family from San Francisco--the sun did not come out even in the morning. A heavy fog hid Vesuvius to the base, and came greying low over the leaden heave of the sea, whose waters were concealed from the eye at a distance of half a mile. Capri was completely invisible, as if it had never existed on earth. The little steamer that was making for the island tossed so violently from side to side that the family from San Francisco lay like stones on the sofas in the miserable saloon of the tiny boat, their feet wrapped in plaids, and their eyes closed. The lady, as she thought, suffered worst of all, and several times was overcome with sickness. It seemed to her that she was dying. But the stewardess who came to and fro with the basin, the stewardess who had been for years, day in, day out, through heat and cold, tossing on these waves, and who was still indefatigable, even kind to every one--she only smiled. The younger lady from San Francisco was deathly pale, and held in her teeth a slice of lemon. Now not even the thought of meeting the prince at Sorrento, where he was due to arrive by Christmas, could gladden her. The gentleman lay flat on his back, in a broad overcoat and a flat cap, and did not loosen his jaws throughout the voyage. His face grew dark, his moustache white, his head ached furiously. For the last few days, owing to the bad weather, he had been drinking heavily, and had more than once admired the "tableaux vivants." The rain whipped on the rattling window-panes, under which water dripped on to the sofas, the wind beat the masts with a howl, and at moments, aided by an onrushing wave, laid the little steamer right on its side, whereupon something would roll noisily away below. At the stopping places, Castellamare, Sorrento, things were a little better. But even the ship heaved frightfully, and the coast with all its precipices, gardens, pines, pink and white hotels, and hazy, curly green mountains swooped past the window, up and down, as it were on swings. The boats bumped against the side of the ship, the sailors and passengers shouted lustily, and somewhere a child, as if crushed to death, choked itself with screaming. The damp wind blew through the doors, and outside on the sea, from a reeling boat which showed the flag of the Hotel Royal, a fellow with guttural French exaggeration yelled

unceasingly: "Rrroy-al! Hotel Rrroy-al!" intending to lure passengers aboard his craft. Then the Gentleman from San Francisco, feeling, as he ought to have felt, quite an old man, thought with anguish and spite of all these "Royals," "Splendids," "Excelsiors," and of these greedy, good-for-nothing, garlic-stinking fellows called Italians. Once, during a halt, on opening his eyes and rising from the sofa he saw under the rocky cliff-curtain of the coast a heap of such miserable stone hovels, all musty and mouldy, stuck on top of one another by the very water, among the boats, and the rags of all sorts, tin cans and brown fishing-nets, and, remembering that this was the very Italy he had come to enjoy, he was seized with despair.... At last, in the twilight, the black mass of the island began to loom nearer, looking as if it were bored through at the base with little red lights. The wind grew softer, warmer, more sweet-smelling. Over the tamed waves, undulating like black oil, there came flowing golden boa-constrictors of light from the lanterns of the harbour.... Then suddenly the anchor rumbled and fell with a splash into the water. Furious cries of the boatmen shouting against one another came from all directions. And relief was felt at once. The electric light of the cabin shone brighter, and a desire to eat, drink, smoke, move once more made itself felt.... Ten minutes later the family from San Francisco disembarked into a large boat; in a quarter of an hour they had stepped on to the stones of the quay, and were soon seated in the bright little car of the funicular railway. With a buzz they were ascending the slope, past the stakes of the vineyards and wet, sturdy orange-trees, here and there protected by straw screens, past the thick glossy foliage and the brilliancy of orange fruits.... Sweetly smells the earth in Italy after rain, and each of her islands has its own peculiar aroma.

The island of Capri was damp and dark that evening. For the moment, however, it had revived, and was lighted up here and there as usual at the hour of the steamer's arrival. At the top of the ascent, on the little piazza by the funicular station stood the crowd of those whose duty it was to receive with propriety the luggage of the Gentleman from San Francisco. There were other arrivals too, but none worthy of notice: a few Russians who had settled in Capri, untidy and absent-minded owing to their bookish thoughts, spectacled, bearded, half-buried in the upturned collars of their thick woollen overcoats. Then a group of long-legged, long-necked, round-headed German youths in Tirolese costumes, with knapsacks over their shoulders, needing no assistance, feeling everywhere at home and always economical in tips. The Gentleman from San Francisco, who kept quietly apart from both groups, was marked out at once. He and his ladies were hastily assisted from the car, men ran in front to show them the way, and they set off on foot, surrounded by urchins and by the sturdy Capri women who carry on their heads the luggage of decent travellers. Across the piazza, that looked like an opera scene in the light of the electric globe that swung aloft in the damp wind, clacked the wooden pattens of the women-porters. The gang of

urchins began to whistle to the Gentleman from San Francisco, and to turn somersaults around him, whilst he, as if on the stage, marched among them towards a mediæval archway and under huddled houses, behind which led a little echoing lane, past tufts of palm-trees showing above the flat roofs to the left, and under the stars in the dark blue sky, upwards towards the shining entrance of the hotel.... And again it seemed as if purely in honour of the guests from San Francisco the damp little town on the rocky little island of the Mediterranean had revived from its evening stupor, that their arrival alone had made the hotel proprietor so happy and hearty, and that for them had been waiting the Chinese gong which sent its howlings through all the house the moment they crossed the doorstep.

The sight of the proprietor, a superbly elegant young man with a polite and exquisite bow, startled for a moment the Gentleman from San Francisco. In the first flash, he remembered that amid the chaos of images which had possessed him the previous night in his sleep, he had seen that very man, to a _t_ the same man, in the same full-skirted frock-coat and with the same glossy, perfectly smoothed hair. Startled, he hesitated for a second. But long, long ago he had lost the last mustard-seed of any mystical feeling he might ever have had, and his surprise at once faded. He told the curious coincidence of dream and reality jestingly to his wife and daughter, as they passed along the hotel corridor. And only his daughter glanced at him with a little alarm. Her heart suddenly contracted with home-sickness, with such a violent feeling of loneliness in this dark, foreign island, that she nearly wept. As usual, however, she did not mention her feelings to her father.

Reuss XVII., a high personage who had spent three whole weeks on Capri, had just left, and the visitors were installed in the suite of rooms that he had occupied. To them was assigned the most beautiful and expert chambermaid, a Belgian with a thin, firmly corseted figure, and a starched cap in the shape of a tiny indented crown. The most experienced and distinguished-looking footman was placed at their service, a coal-black, fiery-eyed Sicilian, and also the smartest waiter, the small, stout Luigi, a tremendous buffoon, who had seen a good deal of life. In a minute or two a gentle tap was heard at the door of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and there stood the _maître d'hôtel_, a Frenchman, who had come to ask if the guests would take dinner, and to report, in case of answer in the affirmative--of which, however, he had small doubt--that this evening there were Mediterranean lobsters, roast beef, asparagus, pheasants, etc., etc. The floor was still rocking under the feet of the Gentleman from San Francisco, so rolled about had he been on that wretched, grubby Italian steamer. Yet with his own hands, calmly, though clumsily from lack of experience, he closed the window which had banged at the entrance of the _maître d'hôtel_, shutting out the drifting smell of distant kitchens and of wet flowers in the garden.

Then he turned and replied with unhurried distinctness, that they would take dinner, that their table must be far from the door, in the very centre of the dining-room, that they would have local wine and champagne, moderately dry and slightly cooled. To all of which the _maître d'hôtel_ gave assent in the most varied intonations, which conveyed that there was not and could not be the faintest question of the justness of the desires of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and that everything should be exactly as he wished. At the end he inclined his head and politely inquired:

"Is that all, sir?"

On receiving a lingering "Yes," he added that Carmela and Giuseppe, famous all over Italy and "to all the world of tourists," were going to dance the tarantella that evening in the hall.

"I have seen picture-postcards of her," said the Gentleman from San Francisco, in a voice expressive of nothing. "And is Giuseppe her husband?"

"Her cousin, sir," replied the _maître d'hôtel_.

The Gentleman from San Francisco was silent for a while, thinking of something, but saying nothing; then he dismissed the man with a nod of the head. After which he began to make preparations as if for his wedding. He turned on all the electric lights, and filled the mirrors with brilliance and reflection of furniture and open trunks. He began to shave and wash, ringing the bell every minute, and down the corridor raced and crossed the impatient ringings from the rooms of his wife and daughter. Luigi, with the nimbleness peculiar to certain stout people, making grimaces of horror which brought tears of laughter to the eyes of chambermaids dashing past with marble-white pails, turned a cart-wheel to the gentleman's door, and tapping with his knuckles, in a voice of sham timidity and respectfulness reduced to idiocy, asked:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

From behind the door, a slow, grating, offensively polite voice:

"Yes, come in."

What were the feelings, what were the thoughts of the Gentleman from San Francisco on that evening so significant to him? He felt nothing exceptional, since unfortunately everything on this earth is too simple in appearance. Even had he felt something imminent in his soul, all the same he would have reasoned that, whatever it might be, it could not take place immediately. Besides, as with all who have just experienced sea-sickness, he was very hungry, and looked forward with delight to the

first spoonful of soup, the first mouthful of wine. So he performed the customary business of dressing in a state of excitement which left no room for reflection.

Having shaved, washed, and dexterously arranged several artificial teeth, standing in front of the mirror, he moistened his silver-mounted brushes and plastered the remains of his thick pearly hair on his swarthy yellow skull. He drew on to his strong old body, with its abdomen protuberant from excessive good living, his cream-coloured silk underwear, put black silk socks and patent-leather slippers on his flat-footed feet. He put sleeve-links in the shining cuffs of his snow-white shirt, and bending forward so that his shirt front bulged out, he arranged his trousers that were pulled up high by his silk braces, and began to torture himself, putting his collar-stud through the stiff collar. The floor was still rocking beneath him, the tips of his fingers hurt, the stud at moments pinched the flabby skin in the recess under his Adam's apple, but he persisted, and at last, with eyes all strained and face dove-blue from the over-tight collar that enclosed his throat, he finished the business and sat down exhausted in front of the pier glass, which reflected the whole of him, and repeated him in all the other mirrors.

"It is awful!" he muttered, dropping his strong, bald head, but without trying to understand or to know what was awful. Then, with habitual careful attention examining his gouty-jointed short fingers and large, convex, almond-shaped finger-nails, he repeated: "It is awful...."

As if from a pagan temple shrilly resounded the second gong through the hotel. The Gentleman from San Francisco got up hastily, pulled his shirt-collar still tighter with his tie, and his abdomen tighter with his open waistcoat, settled his cuffs and again examined himself in the mirror.... "That Carmela, swarthy, with her enticing eyes, looking like a mulatto in her dazzling-coloured dress, chiefly orange, she must be an extraordinary dancer----" he was thinking. So, cheerfully leaving his room and walking on the carpet to his wife's room, he called to ask if they were nearly ready.

"In five minutes, Dad," came the gay voice of the girl from behind the door. "I'm arranging my hair."

"Right-o!" said the Gentleman from San Francisco.

Imagining to himself her long hair hanging to the floor, he slowly walked along the corridors and staircases covered with red carpet, downstairs, looking for the reading-room. The servants he encountered on the way pressed close to the wall, and he walked past as if not noticing them. An old lady, late for dinner, already stooping with age, with milk-white hair and yet _decolletée_ in her pale grey silk dress,

hurried at top speed, funnily, henlike, and he easily overtook her. By the glass-door of the dining-room, wherein the guests had already started the meal, he stopped before a little table heaped with boxes of cigars and cigarettes, and taking a large Manilla, threw three liras on the table. After which he passed along the winter terrace, and glanced through an open window. From the darkness came a waft of soft air, and there loomed the top of an old palm-tree that spread its boughs over the stars, looking like a giant, bringing down the far-off smooth quivering of the sea.... In the reading-room, cosy with the shaded reading-lamps, a grey, untidy German, looking rather like Ibsen in his round silver-rimmed spectacles and with mad astonished eyes, stood rustling the newspapers. After coldly eyeing him, the Gentleman from San Francisco seated himself in a deep leather armchair in a corner, by a lamp with a green shade, put on his pince-nez, and, with a stretch of his neck because of the tightness of his shirt-collar, obliterated himself behind a newspaper. He glanced over the headlines, read a few sentences about the never-ending Balkan war, then with a habitual movement turned over the page of the newspaper--when suddenly the lines blazed up before him in a glassy sheen, his neck swelled, his eyes bulged, and the pince-nez came flying off his nose.... He lunged forward, wanted to breathe--and rattled wildly. His lower jaw dropped, and his mouth shone with gold fillings. His head fell swaying on his shoulder, his shirt-front bulged out basket-like, and all his body, writhing, with heels scraping up the carpet, slid down to the floor, struggling desperately with some invisible foe.

If the German had not been in the reading-room, the frightful affair could have been hushed up. Instantly, through obscure passages the Gentleman from San Francisco could have been hurried away to some dark corner, and not a single guest would have discovered what he had been up to. But the German dashed out of the room with a yell, alarming the house and all the diners. Many sprang up from the table, upsetting their chairs, many, pallid, ran towards the reading-room, and in every language it was asked: "What--what's the matter?" None answered intelligibly, nobody understood, for even to-day people are more surprised at death than at anything else, and never want to believe it is true. The proprietor rushed from one guest to another, trying to keep back those who were hastening up, to soothe them with assurances that it was a mere trifle, a fainting-fit that had overcome a certain Gentleman from San Francisco.... But no one heeded him. Many saw how the porters and waiters were tearing off the tie, waistcoat, and crumpled dress-coat from that same gentleman, even, for some reason or other, pulling off his patent evening-shoes from his black-silk, flat-footed feet. And he was still writhing. He continued to struggle with death, by no means wanting to yield to that which had so unexpectedly and rudely overtaken him. He rolled his head, rattled like one throttled, and turned up the whites of his eyes as if he were drunk. When he had been hastily carried into room No. 43, the smallest, wretchedest, dampest, and coldest room

at the end of the bottom corridor, his daughter came running with her hair all loose, her dressing-gown flying open, showing her bosom raised by her corsets: then his wife, large and heavy and completely dressed for dinner, her mouth opened round with terror. But by that time he had already ceased rolling his head.

In a quarter of an hour the hotel settled down somehow or other. But the evening was ruined. The guests, returning to the dining-room, finished their dinner in silence, with a look of injury on their faces, whilst the proprietor went from one to another, shrugging his shoulders in hopeless and natural irritation, feeling himself guilty through no fault of his own, assuring everybody that he perfectly realized "how disagreeable this is," and giving his word that he would take "every possible measure within his power" to remove the trouble. The tarantella had to be cancelled, the superfluous lights were switched off, most of the guests went to the bar, and soon the house became so quiet that the ticking of the clock was heard distinctly in the hall, where the lonely parrot woodenly muttered something as he bustled about in his cage preparatory to going to sleep, and managed to fall asleep at length with his paw absurdly suspended from the little upper perch.... The Gentleman from San Francisco lay on a cheap iron bed under coarse blankets on to which fell a dim light from the obscure electric lamp in the ceiling. An ice-bag slid down on his wet, cold forehead; his blue, already lifeless face grew gradually cold; the hoarse bubbling which came from his open mouth, where the gleam of gold still showed, grew weak. The Gentleman from San Francisco rattled no longer; he was no more--something else lay in his place. His wife, his daughter, the doctor, and the servants stood and watched him dully. Suddenly that which they feared and expected happened. The rattling ceased. And slowly, slowly under their eyes a pallor spread over the face of the deceased, his features began to grow thinner, more transparent ... with a beauty which might have suited him long ago....

Entered the proprietor. "Gia, e morto!" whispered the doctor to him. The proprietor raised his shoulders, as if it were not his affair. The wife, on whose cheeks tears were slowly trickling, approached and timidly asked that the deceased should be taken to his own room.

"Oh no, madame," hastily replied the proprietor, politely, but coldly, and not in English, but in French. He was no longer interested in the trifling sum the guests from San Francisco would leave at his cash desk. "That is absolutely impossible." Adding by way of explanation, that he valued that suite of rooms highly, and that should he accede to madame's request, the news would be known all over Capri and no one would take the suite afterwards.

The young lady, who had glanced at him strangely all the time, now sat down in a chair and sobbed, with her handkerchief to her mouth. The

elder lady's tears dried at once, her face flared up. Raising her voice and using her own language she began to insist, unable to believe that the respect for them had gone already. The manager cut her short with polite dignity. "If madame does not like the ways of the hotel, he dare not detain her." And he announced decisively that the corpse must be removed at dawn: the police had already been notified, and an official would arrive presently to attend to the necessary formalities. "Is it possible to get a plain coffin?" madame asked. Unfortunately not! Impossible! And there was no time to make one. It would have to be arranged somehow. Yes, the English soda-water came in large strong boxes--if the divisions were removed.

The whole hotel was asleep. The window of No. 43 was open, on to a corner of the garden where, under a high stone wall ridged with broken glass, grew a battered banana tree. The light was turned off, the door locked, the room deserted. The deceased remained in the darkness, blue stars glanced at him from the black sky, a cricket started to chirp with sad carelessness in the wall.... Out in the dimly-lit corridor two chambermaids were seated in a window-sill, mending something. Entered Luigi, in slippers, with a heap of clothes in his hand.

"Pronto?" he asked, in a singing whisper, indicating with his eyes the dreadful door at the end of the corridor. Then giving a slight wave thither with his free hand: "Patenza!" he shouted in a whisper, as though sending off a train. The chambermaids, choking with noiseless laughter, dropped their heads on each other's shoulders.

Tip-toeing, Luigi went to the very door, tapped, and cocking his head on one side asked respectfully, in a subdued tone:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

Then contracting his throat and shoving out his jaw, he answered himself in a grating, drawling, mournful voice, which seemed to come from behind the door:

"_Yes, come in...._"

When the dawn grew white at the window of No. 43, and a damp wind began rustling the tattered fronds of the banana tree; as the blue sky of morning lifted and unfolded over Capri, and Monte Solaro, pure and distinct, grew golden, catching the sun which was rising beyond the far-off blue mountains of Italy; just as the labourers who were mending the paths of the islands for the tourists came out for work, a long box was carried into room No. 43. Soon this box weighed heavily, and it painfully pressed the knees of the porter who was carrying it in a one-horse cab down the winding white high-road, between stone walls and vineyards, down, down the face of Capri to the sea. The driver, a weakly

little fellow with reddened eyes, in a little old jacket with sleeves too short and bursting boots, kept flogging his wiry small horse that was decorated in Sicilian fashion, its harness tinkling with busy little bells and fringed with fringes of scarlet wool, the high saddle-peak gleaming with copper and tufted with colour, and a yard-long plume nodding from the pony's cropped head, from between the ears. The cabby had spent the whole night playing dice in the inn, and was still under the effects of drink. Silent, he was depressed by his own debauchery and vice: by the fact that he gambled away to the last farthing all those copper coins with which his pockets had yesterday been full, in all four lire, forty centesimi. But the morning was fresh. In such air, with the sea all round, under the morning sky headaches evaporate, and man soon regains his cheerfulness. Moreover, the cabby was cheered by this unexpected fare which he was making out of some Gentleman from San Francisco, who was nodding with his dead head in a box at the back. The little steamer, which lay like a water-beetle on the tender bright blueness which brims the bay of Naples, was already giving the final hoots, and this tooting resounded again cheerily all over the island. Each contour, each ridge, each rock was so clearly visible in every direction, it was as if there were no atmosphere at all. Near the beach the porter in the cab was overtaken by the head porter dashing down in an automobile with the lady and her daughter, both pale, their eyes swollen with the tears of a sleepless night.... And in ten minutes the little steamer again churned up the water and made her way back to Sorrento, to Castellamare, bearing away from Capri for ever the family from San Francisco.... And peace and tranquillity reigned once more on the island.

On that island two thousand years ago lived a man entangled in his own infamous and strange acts, one whose rule for some reason extended over millions of people, and who, having lost his head through the absurdity of such power, committed deeds which have established him for ever in the memory of mankind; mankind which in the mass now rules the world just as hideously and incomprehensibly as he ruled it then. And men come here from all quarters of the globe to look at the ruins of the stone house where that one man lived, on the brink of one of the steepest cliffs in the island. On this exquisite morning all who had come to Capri for that purpose were still asleep in the hotels, although through the streets already trotted little mouse-coloured donkeys with red saddles, towards the hotel entrances where they would wait patiently until, after a good sleep and a square meal, young and old American men and women, German men and women would emerge and be hoisted up into the saddles, to be followed up the stony paths, yea to the very summit of Monte Tiberio, by old persistent beggar-women of Capri, with sticks in their sinewy hands. Quieted by the fact that the dead old Gentleman from San Francisco, who had intended to be one of the pleasure party but who had only succeeded in frightening the rest with the reminder of death, was now being shipped to Naples, the happy tourists still slept soundly,

the island was still quiet, the shops in the little town not yet open. Only fish and greens were being sold in the tiny piazza, only simple folk were present, and amongst them, as usual without occupation, the tall old boatman Lorenzo, thorough debauchee and handsome figure, famous all over Italy, model for many a picture. He had already sold for a trifle two lobsters which he had caught in the night, and which were rustling in the apron of the cook of that very same hotel where the family from San Francisco had spent the night. And now Lorenzo could stand calmly till evening, with a majestic air showing off his rags and gazing round, holding his clay pipe with its long reed mouth-piece in his hand, and letting his scarlet bonnet slip over one ear. For as a matter of fact he received a salary from the little town, from the commune which found it profitable to pay him to stand about and make a picturesque figure--as everybody knows.... Down the precipices of Monte Solaro, down the stony little stairs cut in the rock of the old Phœnician road came two Abruzzi mountaineers, descending from Anacapri. One carried a bagpipe under his leather cloak, a large goat skin with two little pipes; the other had a sort of wooden flute. They descended, and the whole land, joyous, was sunny beneath them. They saw the rocky, heaving shoulder of the island, which lay almost entirely at their feet, swimming in the fairy blueness of the water. Shining morning vapours rose over the sea to the east, under a dazzling sun which already burned hot as it rose higher and higher; and there, far off, the dimly cerulean masses of Italy, of her near and far mountains, still wavered blue as if in the world's morning, in a beauty no words can express.... Halfway down the descent the pipers slackened their pace. Above the road, in a grotto of the rocky face of Monte Solaro stood the Mother of God, the sun full upon her, giving her a splendour of snow-white and blue raiment, and royal crown rusty from all weathers. Meek and merciful, she raised her eyes to heaven, to the eternal and blessed mansions of her thrice-holy Son. The pipers bared their heads, put their pipes to their lips: and there streamed forth naive and meekly joyous praises to the sun, to the morning, to Her, Immaculate, who would intercede for all who suffer in this malicious and lovely world, and to Him, born of Her womb among the caves of Bethlehem, in a lowly shepherd's hut, in the far Judean land....

And the body of the dead old man from San Francisco was returning home, to its grave, to the shores of the New World. Having been subjected to many humiliations, much human neglect, after a week's wandering from one warehouse to another, it was carried at last on to the same renowned vessel which so short a time ago, and with such honour, had borne him living to the Old World. But now he was to be hidden far from the knowledge of the voyagers. Closed in a tar-coated coffin, he was lowered deep into the vessel's dark hold. And again, again the ship set out on the long voyage. She passed at night near Capri, and to those who were looking out from the island, sad seemed the lights of the ship slowly hiding themselves in the sea's darkness. But there aboard the liner, in

the bright halls shining with lights and marble, gay dancing filled the evening, as usual....

The second evening, and the third evening, still they danced, amid a storm that swept over the ocean, booming like a funeral service, rolling up mountains of mourning darkness silvered with foam. Through the snow the numerous fiery eyes of the ship were hardly visible to the Devil who watched from the rocks of Gibraltar, from the stony gateway of two worlds, peering after the vessel as she disappeared into the night and storm. The Devil was huge as a cliff. But huger still was the liner, many storeyed, many funnelled, created by the presumption of the New Man with the old heart. The blizzard smote the rigging and the funnels, and whitened the ship with snow, but she was enduring, firm, majestic--and horrible. On the topmost deck rose lonely amongst the snowy whirlwind the cosy and dim quarters where lay the heavy master of the ship, he who was like a pagan idol, sunk now in a light, uneasy slumber. Through his sleep he heard the sombre howl and furious screechings of the siren, muffled by the blizzard. But again he reassured himself by the nearness of that which stood behind his wall, and was in the last resort incomprehensible to him: by the large, apparently armoured cabin which was now and then filled with a mysterious rumbling, throbbing, and crackling of blue fires that flared up explosive around the pale face of the telegraphist who, with a metal hoop fixed on his head, was eagerly straining to catch the dim voices of vessels which spoke to him from hundreds of miles away. In the depths, in the under-water womb of the _Atlantis_, steel glimmered and steam wheezed, and huge masses of machinery and thousand-ton boilers dripped with water and oil, as the motion of the ship was steadily cooked in this vast kitchen heated by hellish furnaces from beneath. Here bubbled in their awful concentration the powers which were being transmitted to the keel, down an infinitely long round tunnel lit up and brilliant like a gigantic gun-barrel, along which slowly, with a regularity crushing to the human soul, revolved a gigantic shaft, precisely like a living monster coiling and uncoiling its endless length down the tunnel, sliding on its bed of oil. The middle of the _Atlantis_, the warm, luxurious cabins, dining-rooms, halls, shed light and joy, buzzed with the chatter of an elegant crowd, was fragrant with fresh flowers, and quivered with the sounds of a string orchestra. And again amidst that crowd, amidst the brilliance of lights, silks, diamonds, and bare feminine shoulders, a slim and supple pair of hired lovers painfully writhed and at moments convulsively clashed. A sinfully discreet, pretty girl with lowered lashes and hair innocently dressed, and a tallish young man with black hair looking as if it were glued on, pale with powder, and wearing the most elegant patent-leather shoes and a narrow, long-tailed dress coat, a beau resembling an enormous leech. And no one knew that this couple had long since grown weary of shamly tormenting themselves with their beatific love-tortures, to the sound of bawdy-sad music; nor did any one know of that thing which lay deep, deep below at the very bottom of the dark

hold, near the gloomy and sultry bowels of the ship that was so gravely overcoming the darkness, the ocean, the blizzard....



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AN OLD MAN'S SONG

by Alexey Koltzov (1809-1842)

I shall saddle a horse,
A swift courser, he,
I shall fly, I shall rush,
As the hawk is keen,
Over fields, over seas,
To a distant land.
I shall overtake there
My young youth again.
I shall make myself spruce
Be a blade again,
I shall make a fine show
For the girls again.
But alas! no road leads
To the past we've left.
And the sun will not rise
For us in the west.

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CAPTIVE KNIGHT

Mikhail Lermontov

Silent I sit by the prison's high window,
Where through the bars the blue heavens are breaking.
Flecks in the azure, the free birds are playing ;
Watching them fly there, my shamed heart is aching.

But on my sinful lips never a prayer,
Never a song in the praise of my charmer;
All I recall are far fights and old battles,
My heavy sword and my old iron armor.

Now in stone armor I hopelessly languish.
And a stone helmet my hot head encases.
This shield is proof against arrows and sword-play.
And without whip, without spur, my horse races.

Time is my horse, the swift-galloping charger.
And for a visor this bleak prison grating.
Walls of my prison are heavy stone armor;
Shielded by cast-iron doors, I am waiting.

Hurry, oh fast-flying Time, fly more quickly!
In my new armor I faint, I am choking.
I shall alight, with Death holding my stirrup.
Then my cold face from this visor uncloaking.

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AS OCEAN'S STREAM

Fyodor Tyutchev
(1803-1873)

As ocean's stream girdles the ball of earth,
From circling seas of dream man's life emerges,
And as night moves in silence up the firth
The secret tide around our mainland surges.

The voice of urgent waters softly sounds;
The magic skiff uplifts white wings of wonder.
The tide swells swiftly and the white sail rounds,
Where the blind waves in shoreless darkness thunder.

And the wide heavens, starred and luminous.
Out of the deep in mystery aspire.
The strange abyss is burning under us;

And we sail onward, and our wake is fire.

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THE CAPITALS ARE ROCKED WITH THUNDER

Nikolai Nekrasov

The capitals are rocked with thunder
Of orators in wordy feuds.
But in the depths of Russia, yonder,
An age-old awful silence broods.
Only the wind in wayside willows,
Coming and going, does not cease;
And corn-stalks touch in curving billows
The earth that cherishes and pillows,
Through endless fields of changeless peace.

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UPON THIS WILD HEADLAND

Apollon Maikov

Upon this wild headland, crowned meanly with indigent rushes

And withering bush and the pitiful green of the pine-trees,

The aged Meniskos, a sorrowful fisherman laid

His son who had perished. His youth the sea, motherwise, nurtured.

That sea whose wide lap took him back, who resistlessly bore him

In death, and who carefully carried the young body shore-ward.

Then mourning Meniskos went forth, and beneath the great willow

He dug him a grave, a plain stone he set for a mark on the cliff-side.

And hung overhead a coarse net he had woven of

willow, —

A fisherman's wreath to be poverty's bitter memento.

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THE AERIAL CITY

Afanasy Shenshin-Foeth

At daybreak there spread through the heavens
Pale clouds like a turreted town:
The cupolas golden, fantastic,
White roofs arid white walls shining down.

This citadel is my white city,
My city familiar and dear,
Above the dark earth as it slumbers.
Upon the pink sky builded clear.

And all that aerial city
Sails northward, sails softly, sails high;
And there on the height, some one beckons, —
But proffers no pinions to fly.

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THE COSMIC FABRIC ^

Yakov Polonsky

This vast web, of Nature's weaving,
Is God's garment, so 'tis said.
In that fabric I — a living,
I — a still unbroken thread.
And the threads run swiftly, never
Halting, yet if once they sever.
Seer or sage shall not suffice
Then the parted strands to splice.
For the Weaver so will veil them
That (let him who may bewail them)
None the ends shall ever find,
Nor one broken thread rebind.
Ceaselessly the threads are breaking,—
Short, ah short will be my span !
Meanwhile, at His fabric's making
Toils the cosmic Artisan, —

Curious patterns still designing,
Wave and crested hill defining,
Steppe and pasture, cloud and sky,
Wood and field of golden rye.
Though with care the wise may scan it,
Flawless since that Hand began it,
Smooth and fine with fair accord —
Shines the garment of the Lord!

^ Tr. by Avrahm Yarmolinsky and Cecil Cowdrey.

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THE CURSE OF LOVE

Dmitry Merezhkovsky

With heavy anguish, hopeless straining,
The bonds of love I would remove.
Oh, to be loosed from their enchaining!
Oh, freedom, only not to love!

The soul that shame and fear are scourging
Crawls through a mist of dust and blood.
From dust, great God, my spirit purging.
Oh, spare me from love's bitter flood !

Is pity's wall alone unshaken?
I pray to God, I cry in vain.
More weary, by all hope forsaken;
Resistless love grows great again.

There is no freedom, unforgiven,
We live as slaves, by life consumed ;
We perish, tortured, bound and driven.
Promised to death, and to love — doomed.

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THE DRAGON

Fyodor Sologub

Evil dragon in the zenith fiercely glowing,
Filaments of flame across the heavens throwing,
Singeing all the valley with a heat that scorches, —
From the deep, dark quiver I will pluck an arrow

Tipped with subtle poison that shall find thy marrow:
All too early flourish thy triumphal torches.
I shall draw my bow in valiant retribution,
I, executor of ruthless execution,
And thy groaning answer my glad ears shall cherish
As I speed the sudden doom long overhanging.
And the arrow whizzes with a brazen twanging.
Thou shalt fade, thou evil dragon, thou shalt perish.

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INEVITABILITY

Valery Brusov

If you kept faith, or not, does it avail?
If I was faithful or unfaithful to you?
Our eyes that would look elsewhere flinch and fail,
Yet not my will has power to undo you.
Once more I tremble, so once more you pale,
As the forebodings of old pain break through you.
The moments pour with noise of torrents streaming :
Above us passion's lifted blade is gleaminjg.

Whoever made us, lips and lit eyes drinking
Of lips and eyes, be it or God or Fate,
Is it not one ? Within the circle shrinking
We stand to hear the spell reverberate!
We bend with happiness and fear, — and sinking,
We fall : two anchors on the sea-floor grate.
Fancy, nor chance, nor passion overpowers
Us, whom the ineluctable devours.

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COMPLAINT

Vyacheslav Ivanov

Your soul, born deaf and blind, inhabits
Jungles of sunless reverie,
Where with the crash of trampled saplings
Wild droves of dark desires roam free.

A torch I kindled in the darkness
To lead you to my starry gate.
With seeds of light in shining handfuls
The furrows of your night to sate.

I stand amid the trackless stretches
And hail you in the wilderness;
But lost in dark and dreary caverns
My cry sinks silent, answerless.

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THE SURF

Yurgis Baltrushaitis

The day's wild ocean sings and thunders,
And beats against the fatal shore,
This breaker with dumb sorrow sunders,
And these like laughing victors roar.
Their sheen — the joy of vernal wonders,
Their sheen — vast winter's shining hoar.

In wrath triumphant forward-swinging,
The lifted billow calls, and fails,
A joyous giant, shouting, singing.
Its voice the voice of sounding gales
Its glory in the sunlight flinging
Whose noonday glow it holds and hails

Across the sea, now lightly foaming.
Another rears, that stirs the deep.
And floods the shore with silence, gloaming;
Morose and slow it seems to creep
Like one who drops, worn out with roaming,
From his bent back a fatal heap.

Each moment new, with changing power,
The surf is thundering, alone.
Now idle, now it seems to lower.
Hymning a Silence all unknown,
Like a dark heart asleep, — for hour
On hour in restless monotone.

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CIMMERIAN TWILIGHT

Maximilian Voloshin

I

The evening light has soaked with ancient gold
And gall the yellow hills. Like tawny fur

Grass rises shaggy in a ruddy blur;
Past fiery bushes metal waves unfold ;
And enigmatic cliffs and boulders hold
Worn troughs that are the sea's chronologer.

In the winged twilight figures seem to stir:
A heavy paw, a jowl grins stark and bold,
Like swelling ribs the dubious hillocks show ;
On what bent back, like wool, does savory grow ?
What brute, what titan, to this region cleaves?

The dark is strange . . . and yonder, space is clean
And there the tired ocean, panting, heaves,
And rotting grasses breathe of iodine.

II

Here stood a sacred forest. Here the messenger
Wing-footed went, his touch upon the dumb glades leaving .. .
Upon the site of cities, nor stones, nor ruins heaving:
Now on burnt slopes but sheep in scattered patches stir.

The mountain peaks: cut crowns! Across each bitten spur
The clear green twilight flows, mysteriously grieving.

By whose dim longing stung, what is my soul retrieving?
Who knows the road of gods? The dawns and dusks that blur?

In its sonorous caves the rubble, churned, is sounding;
Lifting its weighty crests, the troubled sea is pounding
Upon the sandy dunes, upon the ringing shore.

The heavy nights pass on in tears through starry spaces . . .

The outcast gods command, whom men invoke no more,
And ineluctably they show dark, alien faces.

III

Above dark, rippled waters rises in retreat
Earth's heavy mass: the spines and rocky crests defying
The tortured steep in torrents, of red rubble lying —

A lifeless land, its mourning reaches at my feet.
Sad dreams and solemn dreams flow by me, bitter-sweet:
Earth ancient and obscure, whose echoing bays are sighing.
Where in late twilight with a sadder beauty dying
The waves in waste hexameters billow and beat.
And where no roadways run upon the dark's still rivers,
Breathing an ancient mystery, the dim sail swells and quivers
With winds of tossed desire and seas that lift and fall.
An alien tremor takes my ship upon its going
Where destined roads of daring and retribution call.
And lamp-like in the sky the Seven Stars are glowing.

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THE LADY UNKNOWN

Alexander Blok

Of evenings hangs above the restaurant
A humid, wild and heavy air.
The Springtide spirit, brooding, pestilent,
Commands the drunken outcries there.

Far off, above the alley's mustiness.
Where bored gray summerhouses lie.
The baker's sign swings gold through dustiness,
And loud and shrill the children cry.

Beyond the city stroll the exquisites.
At every dusk and all the same:
Their derbies tilted back, the pretty wits
Are playing at the ancient game.

Upon the lake but feebly furious
Soft screams and creaking oar-locks sound.
And in the sky, blase, incurious.
The moon beholds the earthly round.

And every evening, dazed and serious,
I watch the same procession pass;
In liquor, raw and yet mysterious,
One friend is mirrored in my glass.

Beside the scattered tables, somnolent
And dreary waiters stick around.
In vino Veritas!** shout violent

And red-eyed fools in liquor drowned.

And every evening, strange, immutable,
(Is it a dream no waking proves?)
As to a rendezvous inscrutable
A silken lady darkly moves.

She slowly passes by the drunken ones
And lonely by the window sits;
And from her robes, above the sunken ones,
A misty fainting perfume flits.

Her silks' resilience, and the tapering
Of her ringed fingers, and her plumes,
Stir vaguely like dim incense vaporing,
Deep ancient faiths their mystery illumes.

I try, held in this strange captivity,
To pierce the veil that darkling falls —
I see enchanted shores* declivity.
And an enchanted distance calls.

I guard dark secrets' tortuosities.
A sun is given me to hold.
An acrid wine finds out the sinuosities
That in my soul were locked of old.

And in my brain the soft slow flittering
Of ostrich feathers waves once more;
And fathomless the azure glittering
Where two eyes blossom on the shore.

My soul holds fast its treasure renitent,
The key is safe and solely mine.
Ah, you are right, drunken impenitent!
I also know: truth lies in wine.

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EUTHANASIA

Andrey Bely

The shining and ponderous goblet
I empty: the earth drops below me,
All things sink away, — I am treading
Cold space — the vast void — the dim ether.
But distant, in ancient space looming,

My glimmering goblet: the Sun.

I look — far below me are lying
The rivers, the forests, the valleys.
Estranged in the vanishing distance.
A cloud, blowing fog on my eyelids,
Trails gossamer gold in its going.

The flickering landscape is burning
Its last: mid-day stars newly-kindled
Look into my soul, sparkling: " Welcome,"
With radiance silently streaming:
'' The end of long wanderings, brother,
Lies here, in your motherland, welcome ! "

Slow hour upon hour in procession.
Slow centuries, smiling, pass onward.
In ancient space proudly I lift it.
My glimmering goblet: the Sun.

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STILL WAS THE EVENING

Victor Hoffman

Still was the evening of the ball,
The summer ball, with dancers wending
Where ancient linden shadows fall
Upon the river steeply bending;

Where in the trees the breezes breathe
And willows droop like drowsy dreamers;
Where it seemed beautiful to wreathe
The lanterns and the eolored streamers.

A languorous waltz of slow retreatings,
A waltz that singing hardly sounded ;
And many faces, many meetings,
Soft clouds like women's shoulders rounded.

The river looked a sculptured stream,
Serenely the whole heaven holding, —
A fluent and enchanted dream
Of joyous miracles unfolding.

A crimson mantle, golden-bright,
Upon the clouds the sun was flinging;

The dream-swept waltz was drowned in light.
And calling through the dusk and singing.

A languorous waltz beside the river.
And many meetings, many faces,
And near cheeks' warmth, and lovely quiver
Where eyelash with curved eyelash laces.

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LIKE A WHITE STONE

Anna Akhmatova

Like a white stone deep in a draw-well lying,
As hard and clear, a memory lies in me.
I cannot strive nor have I heart for striving:
It is such pain and yet such ecstasy.

It seems to me that someone looking closely
Into my eyes would see it, patent, pale.
And, seeing, would grow sadder and more thoughtful
Than one who listens to a bitter tale.

The ancient gods changed men to things, but left them
A consciousness that smoldered endlessly,
That splendid sorrows might endure forever.
And you are changed into a memory.

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A RUSSIAN SONG

Igor Severyanin

Lace and roses in the forest morning shine,
Shrewdly the small spider climbs his cobweb line.

Dews are diamonding and blooming faery-bright.
What a golden air! What beauty! Oh, what light!

It is good to wander through the dawn-shot rye,
Good to see a bird, a toad, a dragon-fly;

Hear the sleepy crowing of the noisy cock,
And to laugh at echo, and to hear her mock.

Ah, I love in vain my morning voice to hurl.
Ah, off in the birches, but to glimpse a girl.

Glimpse, and leaning on the tangled fence, to chase
Dawn's unwilling shadows from her morning face.

Ah, to wake her from her half-surrendered sleep,
Tell her of my new-sprung dreams, that lift and leap,

Hug her trembling breasts that press against my heart,
Stir the morning in her, hear its pulses start.

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A LENTEN ONE

Lubov Stolitza

Noon in golden thaw is garbed with glory,
Midnight's wrap of silver snows is hoary.
Pink the buds among the aspen's ashes
Where the diamond hoar-frost softly flashes.
My kind cat has furtively departed,
But the swallow has returned, high-hearted.
Winter grief no more our dumb lips locking.
But upon the heart Spring grief is knocking.
And at noon we weep, our bosoms crossing,
Midnight sees us in hot slumber tossing:
Quiet lips, knees pressed as though in prayer,
But our shadowed eyes are our betrayer.

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OCTOBER

Anatoly Marienhof

We trample filial obedience,
We have gone and sat down saucily
Keeping our hats on,
Our feet on the table.

You don't like us, since we guffaw with blood,
Since we don't wash rags washed millions of times,
Since we suddenly dared,
Ear-splittingly, to bark: Wow!

Yes, sir, the spine
Is as straight as a telephone pole.
Not my spine only, but the spines of all Russians,
For centuries hunched.

Who makes a louder noise on earth now than we?
You say: Bedlam —
No milestones — no stakes —
Straight to the devil------ . On the church porch our red
cancan is glorious.

What, you don't believe? Here are hordes,
Droves of clouds at men's beck and call.
And the sky like a woman's cloak.
And no eyelash of sun.

Jesus is on the cross again, and Barabbas
We escort, mealy-mouthed, down the Tverskoi Pros-
pekt. . . .
Who will interrupt, who? The gallop of Scythian horses?
Violins bowing the Marseillaise ?

Has it ever before been heard of, that the forger
Of steel bracelets for the globe
Should smoke his rotten tobacco as importantly
As the officer used to clink his stirrups?

You ask — And then?
And then dancing centuries.
We shall knock at all doors
And no one will say: Goddamyou, get out!

We! We! We are everywhere: i
Before the footlights, in the center of the stage, !
Not softy lyricists.
But flaming buffoons.

Pile rubbish, all the rubbish in a heap,
And like Savonarola, to the sound of hymns.
Into the fire with it. . . . Whom should we fear?
When the mundiculi of puny souls have become — worlds.

Every day of ours is a new chapter in the Bible.
Every page will be great to thousands of generations.
We are those about whom they will say :
The lucky ones lived in 1917.
And you are still shouting: They perish!
You are still whimpering lavishly.
Dunderheads!
Isn't yesterday crushed, like a dove
By a motor
Emerging madly from the garage?



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